

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

**Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc.**

# ACCESS NEWS

**Winter 2017**

**NUMBER LI**

## Funding Available for Veterans

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc. (ATI) continues to seek eligible low- and moderate-income veterans with disabilities in Cortland County (homeowners and renters) who would benefit from funding to complete modifications to make their home more accessible.

In order to qualify, a participant must be certified by the US Department of Veterans Affairs or the Department of Defense as entitled to receive disability payments for a disability incurred during a time of war.

Funding is contingent upon signing a five-year deferred loan agreement. After five years, the loan will be 100% forgiven.

ATI is now accepting applications from qualified candidates. For more information, call Rich Couch, ATI Architectural Barrier Programs Coordinator, at (607) 753-7363.

## ATI Hosts Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

ATI is once again hosting the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program on Saturdays and Sundays throughout the tax season.

The VITA program offers free help to individuals and couples who made less than \$54,000 in 2016 and/or who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit. IRS trained and certified volunteers will be available to help people complete, e-file, and set up direct deposits of your state and federal tax returns.

The VITA staff will also be offering their services at other sites throughout the county from January 20 to the first week in April 2017.

**Call 2-1-1** for more information on VITA and on how you might be able to get your taxes done at ATI or at any of the other locations throughout the County.

## New Faces at ATI

Over the past few months, ATI welcomed two new team members to its family.

In January, ATI hired Richard Couch as its new Architectural Barrier Programs Coordinator. Rich brings over 25 years of experience in government programs, advocacy and government relations to ATI. Rich is already off and running with implementing strategic changes to streamline program processes.

ATI welcomed Stacey Sholar as Public Relation & Fundraising Coordinator to its team in February. Prior to joining ATI, Stacey worked at the Cortland Standard as an Account Manager. Stacey has already launched efforts to improve outreach and outcomes relating to the Agency's 2017 *Friends of the Center* campaign, the upcoming ADA Celebration and a variety of upcoming events, such as ATI Founding Day.

Please join the ATI Board of Directors, staff and consumers in welcoming Rich and Stacey to the ATI family!

**Welcome Aboard!**



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## **A Year in Review: A Letter to Supporters from the ATI Chief Executive Officer**

2016 was a successful year, both for Access to Independence and for people with disabilities in general. Whether it be ATI's completion of a community needs assessment and the development of a five-year strategic plan, the purchase of its first fully accessible vehicle, the facilitation of an all-time record number of systems changes, or ATI's provision of services to more than 2,500 people, there is no doubt that ATI is making a positive impact on the Cortland community and so many others throughout Central New York and beyond. I'd like to share with you some of the great work that our staff and Board of Directors have accomplished this year.

In 2016, the ATI Board of Directors was extremely active in governing the continued growth of ATI. For the fifth consecutive year, ATI generated more than \$1 million in revenue to fund staffing and programming for people in our community. 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 the local bureaucracy.

In 2016, ATI secured \$51,567 in donations from 206 individual and business donors, 58 of which were new, first-time 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 \$205,000 in new grant funds from a variety of sources, including: more than \$20,000 over two years to coordinate the local Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP); \$45,000 over two years to operate a housing subsidy program for Medicaid recipients in nursing facilities; \$50,000 for a new 9-passenger accessible vehicle (seats two people in wheelchairs); and \$90,000 over three years to continue funding local advocacy efforts as part of a statewide systems advocacy network.

In 2016, ATI's staff decreased from 12 to 11 due to unusual staff turnover (three individuals retired, resigned or left due to medical reasons. ATI hired two new Architectural Barrier Specialists and increased its capacity by 35% to coordinate and run its various home modification and accessibility construction services programs. ATI terminated the provision of its Traumatic Brain Injury and Nursing Home Transition and Diversion service coordination services, but added additional staff capacity to help people on Medicaid transition out of nursing homes and to find accessible, affordable and integrated housing options.

In 2016, ATI provided intensive services to 454 consumers between the age of 5 and 96. Those consumers experienced cognitive, physical and/or mental health 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 154 people with disabilities, their family members or their caregivers this year. ATI provides a menu of several dozen services, including: nursing home transition / diversion, peer counseling, information & referral, individual and systems advocacy, independent living skills training, architectural barrier removal, recreational, business / industry / agency, youth transition, work readiness and benefits advisement, to name a few.

In 2016, ATI staff invested nearly 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, fought for increased public transit options, continued efforts to help medical facilities become more accessible for patients with disabilities, continued efforts to facilitate increased access to social and recreational opportunities throughout the County, continued efforts to enact visitability and source of income law in the County and fought for increased accessibility on sidewalks, roadways and in businesses.

In 2016, ATI staff invested an additional 1,000 hours to fight for systems changes at the state level. ATI staff serve in key leadership positions on several governor-appointed state councils. As a result of ATI advocacy efforts, the approved NYS budget included: (1) a \$5 million increase in capital funding for upstate transit systems; (2) a 5.3% increase to State Transportation Operating Assistance (STOA) funding to upstate transit systems; and (3) a delay in the transition of the Medicaid Waiver TBI and NHTD Medicaid Waiver programs to Managed Care until 2018. As a result of ATI advocacy efforts, Governor Cuomo signed into law legislation that expanded mental health and suicide prevention training to NYS law enforcement officers.

Many thanks and much appreciation goes out to all of ATI's staff, Board Members and community supporters for making 2016 a transformational year for people with disabilities in Cortland County and beyond! Just the same, our work is not done. People with disabilities in our community are still unable to enjoy the same civil rights as people without disabilities and are still unable to participate fully in all aspects of life due to persistent structural and attitudinal barriers. With your help and support, 2017 will bring even more progress in our fight for equality!

## ATI Launches Community Taskforce on Increasing Disability Employment (TIDE)

Over the past two months, ATI continued efforts to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities in Cortland County. In January, a newly established Taskforce to Increase Disability Employment (TIDE) met to further develop its mission and 2017 goals. In February, ATI began a project with SUNY Cortland's Community Innovation Lab students to identify employment and training opportunities that exist for people with disabilities and transition-aged youth.

On January 19, TIDE members discussed the barriers to employment that remain for people with disabilities, including job application processes, transportation and access to job opportunities, the ongoing need for customized employment and the number of and skill level needed for existing job opportunities. These myriad issues will help shape the mission, goals and activities of TIDE over the next several months and years and help TIDE recruit new stakeholders to the group.

Currently, TIDE has members from ATI, ACCES-VR, the NYS Commission for the Blind, Employment Connection, Cortland Works Career Center, Cortland County Mental Health and Homer High School. To be effective in increasing employment opportunities, TIDE members hope to recruit local business representatives, employment service providers, and people with disabilities to take an active role in the taskforce.

Students from the SUNY Cortland Community Innovation Lab will play a crucial role in initial outreach efforts. As part of the Lab course, the students assigned to ATI's project will develop an inventory of local businesses that are willing to participate in vocational training activities, such as job shadowing, career exploration, internships and other job training opportunities. This includes a survey and educational materials that can be shared with local businesses in Cortland County.

As the SUNY Cortland project and TIDE activities continue to take shape and evolve, ATI will work to keep the community up-to-date and engaged in the events to come. Employment is a topic that involves many factors, including politics, economics and local collaboration. It is a complex issue that we must work together to improve. ATI is grateful for the early commitment of local partners and is excited for the potential new partnerships and opportunities that TIDE can offer to our community.

For more information on TIDE and local employment activities, please contact Aaron T. Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator, by phone at (607) 753-7363, or by email at [abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).

### Violinist Gets Second Chance

ATI staff routinely work with individuals who reside in institutional settings and community-based settings to help them live more independent lives. Staff often learn the most interesting things about people during this work, including their hobbies, their histories and their dreams.

Anne Piché, ATI Transition Specialist, had one experience with an individual who resides in a nursing facility. During their conversations, Anne learned that earlier in his life he played the violin in an orchestra. This was a very important part of his life, and he talked about it with such fondness.

Anne shared this information with ATI Program Assistant, Maria R. Mucaria, a professional musician with international connections. Maria contacted Sigma Alpha Iota ( $\Sigma$ AI) for their Philanthropies, Inc. project titled "People to People". The program collects donated instruments and matches them to individuals who lost their instruments because of various disasters.

Within just a few short months, ATI received a violin in the mail for the individual. In delivering the instrument to the consumer, he said, "you have made me happy today".

Many thanks to Anne, Maria and  $\Sigma$ AI for your exceptional human service work and commitment to the independent living philosophy!



## ATI Launches Statewide Advocacy on 2017 Budget and Disability Policy Priorities

Access to Independence (ATI) recently launched 2017 advocacy efforts to fight for the rights of people with disabilities in Cortland County and statewide. These efforts are consistent with priorities determined by ATI's 2016 Community Needs Assessment and its 2017 Strategic Imperatives and Goals. To address the unmet needs of people with disabilities, their families and caregivers, ATI requires additional base funding to support staff, operations and programming. As such, ATI is urging legislators to increase base funding for statewide Independent Living Centers (ILCs) to \$18 million. ILCs have secured the support of the NYS Board of Regents and the NYS Education Department for this \$5 million increase.

ILCs provide critical services to people with disabilities to help them navigate the ever-changing service systems in order to live independent, fully integrated lives in the community. As the State continues to redesign health care in ways that are intended to increase quality and decrease costs, ILCs are serving in increasingly more crucial roles. ILCs provide a wide range of services based on the local needs, all of which are aimed at addressing the social determinants of health: education, employment, housing and social skills.

Second, ATI believes that NYS must prioritize the employment of people with disabilities. Working-age people with disabilities in NYS have a mere 31.6% employment rate and a 41.1% employment gap when compared to non-disabled people. The poverty rate is for New Yorkers with disabilities is 17% higher than non-disabled people. NYS must enact Employment First recommendations, including a business tax credit for people with disabilities and including disability-owned businesses in the Minority & Women Business Enterprise (MWBE) program. NYS must do what it can to ensure that people with disabilities (especially youth with disabilities exiting high school) have access to equal employment opportunity.

Third, ATI believes that NYS must increase focus on rural public transportation systems and work to increase transportation options available to people with disabilities. NYS should increase reimbursement rates for State Transit Operating Assistance (STOA) by more than 2% and add at least \$5 million to support transit systems in rural counties. Further, NYS should move forward with measures to permit Transportation Networks, such as Uber and Lyft, to operate in upstate NYS. People with disabilities must have access to safe, affordable and accessible transportation options to ensure access to employment, social events and activities of daily living.

Fourth, ATI believes that NYS must invest in programs that support accessible, affordable and integrated housing for people with disabilities. NYS must create a Visitability tax credit as part of the budget to help homeowners retrofit their homes to make them more accessible, or to incentivize the inclusion of visitable features at the time of construction. Further, NYS must restore Access to Home funding to \$4 million. Access to Home offers critical home modifications to hundreds of New Yorkers with disabilities annually to ensure their ability to live independently in their home. Last, NYS must make discrimination by landlords based on a tenant's source of income illegal under NYS Human Rights Law.

For more information on ATI's statewide disability priorities or to join the Access to Independence Advocacy Network, please contact Aaron T. Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator, by phone at (607) 753-7363, or by email at [abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).



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## ATI Launches 2017 Local Advocacy Priorities

ATI recently announced its 2017 local advocacy priority agenda:

**Education:** ATI will advocate and collaborate with County-wide school districts and service providers to implement the use and adoption of an ATI-developed Community Resource Guide (CRG). ATI will advocate to ensure that there is an increase in the number of schools and service providers who change their practices to incorporate the peer-reviewed CRG as a part of their transition services to youth with disabilities.

**Employment:** ATI will advocate for increased accessible employer recruitment, training and hiring practices for people with disabilities. ATI will inventory local employers and rate their policies and practices on accessibility to job seekers. ATI will advocate to ensure that there is an increase in the number of employers that make necessary policy and structural changes to improve accessibility.

**Health Care:** ATI will continue to advocate for increased access to local medical offices, facilities and locations. ATI will inventory these facilities and rate each on their accessibility to the public. ATI will advocate to ensure that there is an increase in the number of facilities that make necessary policy and structural changes to improve accessibility.

**Commerce:** ATI will advocate for increased access to local businesses and their products and services. ATI will inventory these businesses and rate each on their accessibility to the public. ATI will advocate to ensure that there is an increase in the number of businesses that make necessary policy and structural changes to improve accessibility.

**Social:** ATI will continue to advocate for increased access to local tourist, recreation and faith-based facilities and locations. ATI will inventory these facilities and rate each on accessibility to the public. ATI will advocate to ensure that there is an increase in the number of facilities that make necessary policy and structural changes to improve accessibility.

**Citizenship:** ATI will advocate for housing policy changes throughout Cortland County, including its City, Towns, and Villages. ATI will focus on: 1) visitable home design code/ordinance requirements and 2) eliminating housing discrimination based on a person's source of income. ATI will work closely with the Cortland County Housing Consortium, local government and community advocates and stakeholders to address these issues.

For more information on ATI's local advocacy efforts, contact Aaron T. Baier by phone at (607) 753-7363, or by email at [abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).

## A Day in the Life as an Ombudsman by Maria R. Mucaria

As I walk the halls of one of my assigned long term care facilities, I greet faces with a smile, talk to those who seek conversations and listen to complaints and concerns from others. There are so many stories to be heard, both good and bad. Residents have the right to a safe, healthy and happy life, no matter their address.

I recently met a woman whose family was so concerned about her that they called me with questions, concerns and complaints, but they forgot to ask her what she wanted. So, I helped facilitate discussions and dialogue between the woman and the family members.

Another resident came forward seeking assistance with getting his medication working. It seemed that he was struggling with the slow progress of his healing. I spoke with the nurses to understand how the medication was to work and to give him a better understanding of how he needed to be patient to see the results.

One facility administrator contacted me with concern for a resident for whom they were struggling to provide services. They felt the resident would be better served at a different facility, one that could provide a more appropriate level of care. But, the administrator didn't want the individual out in the streets, so he provided the best possible care until he moved.

These are just a few examples of people who need good strong advocates to be there to help speak with them so that their voices are heard.

The New York State Long Term Care Ombudsmen Program helps residents of nursing facilities and assisted living and adult care facilities and their families, to understand and exercise their rights to quality of care and quality of life. The program advocates at the individual and systemic level by:

- Receiving, investigating and resolving complaints made by or on behalf of residents;
- Promoting the development of residents and family councils; and
- Informing governmental agencies, providers and the general public about issues and concerns impacting residents of long-term care facilities

To learn more about the Cortland County Ombudsman Program, and to learn about how you can become a volunteer ombudsman at a local nursing facility, contact Maria R. Mucaria by phone: (607) 753-7363, or email: [mmucaria@aticortland.org](mailto:mmucaria@aticortland.org).

## Housing Consortium Planning for the Future

On February 28, the Cortland County Housing Consortium gathered for its quarterly meeting at ATI. At that meeting, the group reviewed next-steps for the Cortland County Consolidated Plan for Housing, continued planning of a Housing Confab, set goals for 2017 and secured updates from partner agencies.

Over the past five years, the Consortium has gone through great lengths to update the County's original 2002 Consolidated Plan for Housing. This year, the group is ready to bring the draft Consolidated Plan to the County Legislature for adoption. The group is also discussing ways to continuously improve upon the document by way of the development of action items.

The Consolidated Housing Plan is a critical document for local agencies and housing providers. Its primary purpose is to provide local housing statistics and data to aid in applications for grants and funding from Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This data also serves to paint a picture of the quality, quantity and affordability of housing in the County. Further, the Plan should offer a strategic planning component that takes the current state of housing and then lists goals and strategies to improve areas of need. Currently, the draft Consolidated Plan has up-to-date data and statistics but lacks a full and complete vision and strategy for the County. This is one of the areas that will be updated in the coming years.

In an effort to educate the community on housing needs and secure input from the community on housing goals, the Consortium began planning for a Housing Confab. The Confab is a half day event that will feature guest presenters on a few of the major housing needs, including the Housing First model for recovery and treatment, health and environmental issues with housing and issues related to aging-in-place and accessibility. The Confab will also feature a listening panel of local and state elected officials who will have an opportunity to share their goals for housing in Cortland County and for them to hear our community's input on those goals.

While the last Housing Confab took place more than a decade ago, the Consortium believes that this event will spark a renewed interest and awareness for housing in Cortland County. Housing is a complex topic with many components and no easy solutions. To resolve issues with housing, the community will need to get involved, talk to their elected officials and take action to ensure that all citizens of Cortland County have access to safe, affordable, accessible and integrated housing.

For more information on the Housing Consortium and local housing issues, please contact Aaron T. Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator, by phone at (607) 753-7363, or by email at [abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).

## Cortland County Housing Consortium

### **2017 - 2018 Meeting Schedule**

**May 23, 2017: 8:00 - 10:00 am**

**August 22, 2017: 8:00 - 10:00 am**

**November 28, 2017: 8:00 - 10:00 am**

**February 27, 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  
contact Aaron Baier by email:  
[abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).**

### **ATI Seeking Volunteers**

Access to Independence of Cortland County, Inc. (ATI) is seeking motivated volunteers to help with a number of pressing initiatives this year.

ATI is currently seeking motivated volunteers to help with the planning of its 2017 fund development initiatives, including its July 2017 ADA Celebration events and its October 27, Annual Masquerade Gala.

ATI is also seeking volunteers to help with various local systems change initiatives that (1) aim to identify (inventory) lack of access for people with disabilities (e.g., housing, transportation, medical facilities, sidewalks, businesses, etc.); (2) increase public awareness of these deficiencies; and (3) take action to facilitate change.

For more information on how you can help out with either initiative, call: (607) 753-7363, or email: [volunteer@aticortland.org](mailto:volunteer@aticortland.org).

### **JOIN OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS!**

**Access to Independence (ATI) is recruiting  
interested individuals with diverse  
backgrounds in finance, fund  
development, nonprofit management  
and/or program development 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](mailto:cwunderwood@aticortland.org)**

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## 2017 Benefits Changes

By this time, everyone receiving Social Security benefits has noticed a small increase in their monthly check. The Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) for 2017 was .03% (resulting in a \$2 or \$3 increase in your SSDI payment (depending on your level of benefit). An individual living alone and receiving SSI saw an increase of \$2 per month. The federal SSI rate is now \$735. If you live in NYS, you may also receive a state supplement of \$87.

Because the COLA was so small this year, most people already receiving Medicare Part B will not see an increase in their monthly premium. If you are new to Medicare this year, your monthly premium will be \$134 per month. Medicare Part B covers your doctors, durable medical equipment, and outpatient therapies. Medicare Part B has a \$183 deductible per year and a 20% co-pay on covered services.

For people with lower incomes, there are several Medicare Savings Programs that can help pay your Part B premiums and co-pays. Income levels in 2016 were:

- **Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) Program**: If an individual's income is below \$1,010 per month and their resource level is below \$7,280, this program helps pay for Part B premiums, deductible, coinsurance, and co-pays. For a couple, the combined income would be less than \$1,355 and the resource level would be less than \$10,930.
- **Specified Low-Income Medicare Beneficiary (SLMB) Program**: If an individual's income is below \$1,208 and their resource level is below \$7,280, this program will help pay for the Part B premium only. For a couple, the combined income would be less than \$1,622 and the resource level would be less than \$10,930.
- **Qualifying Individual (QI) Program**: You must apply every year for QI benefits. QI applications are granted on a first-come, first-served basis, with priority given to people who received QI benefits the previous year. (If you qualify for Medicaid, you are not eligible to receive QI benefits.) If an individual has income of less than \$1,357 and resources of less than \$7,280, this program can pay the Part B premium. For a couple, the combined income would be less than \$1,823 and the resource level would be less than \$10,930.
- **Qualified Disabled and Working Individuals (QDWI)**: This program helps pay the Part A premium if; you are a working disabled person under 65; you lost your premium-free Part A when you went back to work; you aren't getting medical assistance from your state and you meet the income and resource limits required by your state. If an individual's income is below \$4,045 and their resources are below \$4,000. For a couple their income is less than \$5,425 and their resources are below \$6,000.

Medicare Part D premiums can increase on a yearly basis whether there is a COLA increase or not. Everyone with a Part D prescription plan should read over the material sent to them each year and check to make sure their plan still suits their needs. If not, there is an annual enrollment (October to January) period when you can change your Part D plan to better suit your needs.

Each Part D plan will send out a formulary every year to let you know what drugs they will cover. If your drugs are not on the formulary, you will either need to talk with your doctor about using a different drug or find a plan that will cover your current medications. There are several ways to receive help to pay your Medicare Part D premiums.

- If you have Medicaid and your monthly income is less than \$1,010 for a single or \$1,355 for a couple, you will receive full extra help. You will have \$0 premium (for a benchmark plan) and \$0 deductible. The co-pay for generic drugs will be \$1.20 and for brand names it will be \$3.70.
- If you have Medicaid and/or the Medicare Savings Plan and your monthly income is above \$1,010 for a single or above \$1,355 for a couple, you will receive full extra help. You will have a \$0 premium and a \$0 deductible. The co-pay for generic drugs will be \$3.30 and for brand names it will be \$8.25
- If you only have Medicare and your monthly income is below \$1,356 or \$1,822 for a couple and your resources are below \$8,890 for a single and \$14,090 for a couple, you will receive full extra help. You will have a \$0 premium and a \$0 deductible. You will pay \$3.30 for generic drugs and \$8.25 for brand name drugs.
- If you have Medicare and your monthly income is below \$1505 or \$2022 for a couple, you may be eligible for partial extra help.
- If you are working and receiving SSDI benefits, the earned income limit has increased to \$1,170. The trial work period limit has increased to \$840 per month.

For more information on any of the aforementioned changes or to further discuss how returning back to work might impact your benefits, contact Susan Lewis, ATI Independent Living Coordinator, by telephone: (607) 753-7363; or by email: [susan.lewis@aticortland.org](mailto:susan.lewis@aticortland.org).

## **Wage Reporting for SSA Disability Beneficiaries**

If you receive SSI or SSDI and you have returned to work, you are required to report your wages on a **monthly** basis. If you do not report your wages and Social Security (SSA) decides you are no longer eligible for a benefit check, you could be responsible to pay back any money SSA says you owe them from the time you became ineligible for a benefit check.

### **Wage Reporting Basics**

When you start a new job, you must inform SSA; they will not automatically know that you have returned to work. The best method way to inform SSA is to send a letter to your local SSA field office. Keep a copy of the letter with the date mailed for your records. If you live in Cortland County, you need to report to the Syracuse office. If you live in Tompkins County, you need to report to the Ithaca office. The letter should contain the following:

- Your name and social security number
- The name of your employer
- The number of hours you work each week
- Your hourly rate, and
- Your start date

When you experience increases or decreases in hours or pay, report the change to your local SSA field office ASAP in writing. Keep a copy of the letter with the date sent for your records.

### **When and How**

You should report wages to the local SSA field office each month. For most SSA disability beneficiaries, the preferred method of reporting is by mail. Be sure to report all monthly wages each month. If you have more than one job, make sure you include paycheck stubs from all jobs.

- Keep a copy of all paystubs that you submit to SSA.
- File your original check stubs for your records. Write your social security number on the paycheck stubs you submit to SSA.
- If you report your wages in person, ask for a receipt and keep the receipt for your records.
- If you report your wages by mail, include a letter that asks SSA to send you a receipt and keep it for your records.

For more information or to get help deciding what wage reporting method you should use, contact Susan Lewis, ATI Independent Living Coordinator, by telephone: (607) 753-7363; or by email: [susan.lewis@aticortland.org](mailto:susan.lewis@aticortland.org).

## **Youth Transition: Wrap Around Supports**

Exiting high school can be the most exciting time of a young person's life. It can also be confusing and even anxiety-inducing. Youth receive training from their school and are expected to be prepared for college, work and living independently. We also receive training when we learn to drive or learn a new job. However, we usually need a bit of support to become experts in these skills. Transition from high school is no different.

When youth leave high school, they are expected to have learned the academic skills needed to graduate. They are also expected to have some idea of the direction they want their life to go, such as college or employment. Finally, they are expected to be able to move from an environment where services are delivered to them to a much broader community where they must seek out the services they need.

Everyone has a support system. They are the people that surround us and provide emotional support, physical assistance and mentor us to achieve our goals. Our family, friends, faith leaders, mentors, doctors, teachers, coworkers, counselors, advisors, and job coaches, can all be a part of our support systems. The key to a good support system is that youth be in the center of this circle and have the ability to make decisions that impact their life while receiving guidance from supports.

Parents may take their student to a college, to learn about counseling services or to find a mentor at a local agency. Mentors may show the youth some volunteer opportunities, take them to learn about different jobs, or even share their own life experiences for the youth to think about. This support-based learning supplements the knowledge they acquired in high school and gives them a broader perspective on life, their community and on the goals they have set for themselves.

A support system may be two people or it may be twenty. The key is for the youth to feel like they have the amount of support they need. Think about your life and your goals, do you know someone who can help you reach those goals? Do you know where you can get help if you need it?

If you feel like you need more support or want to learn more about your community, there is always a place to go. Depending on the questions you have, a good place to start would be ATI. ATI offers a variety of youth transition services, including work readiness, benefits advisement and peer mentoring, among many others.

For more information on ATI's Youth Transition Services, please contact Aaron T. Baier, Consumer & Systems Advocacy Coordinator, by phone at (607) 753-7363, or by email at [abaier@aticortland.org](mailto:abaier@aticortland.org).

## ATI Consumer Grievance Policy: 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. You may contact ATI's Independent Living Coordinator at (607) 753-7363 for more information about the complaint or grievance process. You may also file a complaint or grievance by writing, calling or emailing the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), who will respond to your complaint or grievance within ten business days.

**Access to Independence of Cortland County**  
Chad W. Underwood, CEO  
26 North Main Street  
Cortland, New York 13045  
Phone: (607) 753-7363

Email: [cwunderwood@aticortland.org](mailto:cwunderwood@aticortland.org)

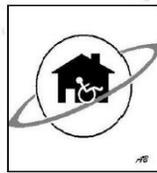
In the event you are not satisfied with the response, or in the event the CEO is unable to respond within ten business days, you may file a complaint, grievance or appeal to the ATI Board of Director's Governance Committee, who will respond to your complaint, grievance or appeal within ten business days.

**Access to Independence of Cortland County**  
Dr. Judy K. C. Bentley, Board Chair  
26 North Main Street  
Cortland, New York 13045  
Phone: (607) 753-7363

Email: [admin@aticortland.org](mailto:admin@aticortland.org)

In the event you are not satisfied with the response of the ATI Board of Director's Governance Committee, you may file a complaint or grievance with the NYS Education Department:

**ACCES-VR Centers Administration Unit**  
Robert Gumson, Manager of IL Services  
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## ATI Opens '17 Workshop Series

Access to Independence (ATI) aims to offer interesting and useful workshops to the community that engage all of our stakeholders (including people with disabilities, family members, caregivers, human service providers, government officials and business leaders).

New this year, ATI is facilitating monthly workshops that directly address areas of unmet need identified in the Agency's 2016 Community Needs Assessment.

On January 18, ATI hosted its first workshop of the year, entitled "A Community Dialogue: Expanding Cross-Systems Peer Mentoring." Consistent with the month-long recognition of National Mentoring Month, this workshop sparked an ongoing conversation about the benefits of peer mentoring and how it can be expanded to more people in our community.

On February 15, ATI hosted a workshop, entitled "Understanding the ADA and How to Communicate Respectfully and Effectively with People with Disabilities". Guest panelists provided their perspectives on the stigmas related with disability, barriers encountered by their specific populations and solutions to increase independence and inclusion in the community.

For more information on either of the aforementioned workshops, call (607) 753-7363 or email [info@aticortland.org](mailto:info@aticortland.org).

For more information on upcoming Agency workshops and events, check out ATI's website: [www.aticortland.org](http://www.aticortland.org).

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## Core Advisory Group Emergency Preparedness 2017 - 2018 Meeting Schedule

**May 18, 2017: 11:00 - 12:00 Noon**

**Aug. 17, 2017: 11:00 - 12:00 Noon**

**Nov. 16, 2017: 11:00 - 12:00 Noon**

**Feb. 15, 2018: 11:00 - 12:00 Noon**

**All meetings are held at:  
Access to Independence  
26 N. Main Street, Cortland, NY**

**For more information, call (607)  
753-7363, or contact Fran Pizzola**

## 2017 Bowl-4-Abilities Event

On Saturday, March 4, more than 50 bowlers convened at Cort-Lanes to enjoy an afternoon of rocking music, inclusive recreation fun, pizza, and door prizes donated by 15 local businesses!

ATI awarded four King Pin Trophies at this year's event. In the Individual Categories, Tina Carden was recognized for most money raised by an individual and Max Benz won for most pins knocked down by an individual. Team Pizzola took home the trophy for most pins knocked down by a team. The Cortland Bus Drivers Team took home the trophy for most money raised by a team.

The 2017 ATI Bowl-4-Abilities would not have been such a success without the ardent support of community donors and businesses. This year's event sponsors included SUNY Cortland Student Government Association, the Brickner Family, Cortland Regional Medical Center, Eves Broadcasting, Higgins Supply, OCM BOCES, the Underwood Family and Rich Couch.

Many thanks go out to all of this year's bowlers and contributors!

## ATI Continues 2017 Workshop Series to Address Unmet Community Need

On March 15, ATI will host a workshop entitled, “Serving Customers with Disabilities: Reaching out & Expanding Your Market”. This workshop will focus in detail on why organizations should become accessible and more welcoming to customers with disabilities. Carin **Rouleau**, Manager of Walmart in Painted Post, NY will share her experience in staff development, sensitivity training and best practices in working with disabled employees and in serving customers with disabilities.

During this workshop, participants will have an opportunity to think about and identify their own concerns, challenges or dilemmas in serving customers with disabilities. Participants will:

- learn the 10 reasons why being more welcoming and inclusive to customers with disabilities is good business;
- have an opportunity to see how people with disabilities view their business facility and customer service practices;
- learn the basic principles of interacting with people with different types of disabilities, which will lead to how to better serve customers with various disabilities; and
- gain an understanding on how to make changes to improve accessibility and remove barriers in their businesses to better serve all people with disabilities.

On April 26, ATI will host a workshop entitled, “Community Dialogue: Home Health Care & Options for Community Based Services”.

The philosophy of the independent living movement is one of inclusion and community living for people with disabilities in the most integrated setting. In addition, one of the main core services of Independent Living Centers (ILC’s) is nursing home diversion and transition services. However, the main roadblock to ensuring a streamlined diversion or transition out of a nursing facility is the need for Home Health Aides (HHA’s) and or Personal Assistant Services (PAS).

This workshop will provide an informational panel to help make everyone aware of the options that currently exist for long-term home health care. We will work together to discuss and develop strategies and solutions to affect positive changes. We will address the challenges of recruiting, training and keeping home health aides and the stigmas and public perceptions that make that difficult. Panelists will include: Eden Harrington-Hall (CAPCO); Millissa Ross (Cortland Regional Medical Center); Dacia Leggé (NYS Open Doors); Laura O’Hara (Southern Tier Independence Center); Amber Giamei (Area Agency on Aging); and Mary-Ann DeMoney (Independent Consumer Advocacy Network).

On May 17, ATI will host workshop entitled: “Reaching Individuals with Disabilities: The Impact of Accessibility in Private or Commercial Businesses”. Participants will learn:

- legal requirements under the ADA for private entities in places of public accommodations;

- how to evaluate the accessibility of your business/facility;
- how to ensure effective communication with customers; and
- market trends related to customers with disabilities.

To enhance the program, ATI has invited as panelists Cortland business stakeholders: Bob Haight, Executive Director of the Cortland County Chamber of Commerce; Adam McGivern, Executive Director of the Downtown Partnership; and Bill Knickerbocker, Deputy Chief/Codes Director from Cortland’s Code Enforcement Office.

ATI seeks to proactively teach business owners about the ADA. The main objective of this course is to help businesses that have little or no experience with the ADA to gain an understanding of the law and its obligation, as well as increase their knowledge about the disposable income of people with disabilities. Ultimately, our purpose with this ADA workshop, is to make a difference in improving attitudes and the perception people have about people (customers) with disabilities.

All workshops will take place in the ATI Community Room, 26 North Main Street, in downtown Cortland, on a Wednesday from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. A light lunch will be offered to participants. For more information, or to RSVP for any workshop, please contact Fran Pizzola, ATI Community Education Coordinator, by email: [fpizzola@aticortland.org](mailto:fpizzola@aticortland.org), or by phone: (607)753-7363.

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