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with Disabilities

Access To Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

ACCESS NEWS

Spring/Summer 2019

Issue 60

Growth

Whether you have a disability or not, a fundamental part of every person's life is growth. We all grow physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually as we build connections to the people and places around us. Growth is how we make progress in our own lives, and ultimately how we make our mark on the world.

Growth means embracing the reality that human beings – along with communities, businesses and policies – are all wired for change. Change can be positive or it can hurt, but every transition helps us to grow.

Read on to learn about some of the changes ATI has experienced this year and how we continue to grow as an agency!



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QUARTERLY QUOTE

"One can choose to go back toward safety, or forward toward growth."

- Abraham Maslow

A Message from ATI's Executive Director



Dear Friends,

Now that we are past the half-way point of 2019, we start to reflect on all that we have accomplished over the last eight months and begin focusing on plans for the future. Without a doubt, the theme for Access To Independence and our community this year has been *growth*.

Since March, Access To Independence has regrouped and hired new staff to ensure that people with disabilities continue to receive quality services, resources and advocacy. We welcome Karla Hoag, ATI's Program Assistant, who provides support to the Accessibility Modification Program, Craft Class and front desk. Also new to ATI is Alison McCabe, Education Advocacy Coordinator, who will oversee the Agency's community education and outreach efforts as well as the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network program. Last but not least we welcome Jean Rightmire, ATI's Fundraising & Grants Coordinator, who has already been hard at work on several grant opportunities and planning for our next big fundraiser initiatives!

Access To Independence has continued to focus on developing community partnerships and new, inclusive opportunities for people with disabilities, their families and caregivers. On June 2, ATI joined with Cortland City Community Policing, the Racker Centers, Cortland LGBT Center, and other community organizations to host the First Annual Community Outreach Picnic – Stone Soup – which provided an inclusive and diverse event for everyone in our community to enjoy good food, a great story and an amazing message of togetherness for our community! ATI was a proud sponsor and participant in this event and we hope to continue our involvement in future years.

ATI also continued to refocus our outreach and education efforts. Staff provided education and training to the Alzheimer's Association, YOUTH POWER!, Cortland County Department of Social Services, and our State Leaders in Albany. While ATI is dedicated to serving Cortland County, we continue to expand our regional and statewide partnerships to ensure that positive opportunities for growth include everyone in our community. We strive to make sure that people in Cortland have access to these opportunities and can take full advantage of anything they may be able to offer.

While this year has proven to be an incredible journey in helping people with disabilities, we also recognize that it has been a challenging year for many. For ATI and our team of staff and Board, we continue to mourn the loss of our friend and founder, Ms. Frances A. Pizzola. In this edition of Access News, we have a special insert dedicated to her life and legacy at Access To Independence. As we look toward an exciting future, we remember Fran's legacy of Independence, Dignity and Hope.

Access To Independence will continue to keep you informed of our existing and upcoming initiatives in this newsletter, on Facebook, on our website and through regular community outreach. We apologize if you have missed seeing our newsletter since February – but we are back! This short break allowed our new staff the opportunity to acquire training, and our existing staff to focus on what they do best: empowering people with disabilities to lead independent lives in our community. Thank you for your readership and for your support of Access To Independence!

Sincerely,

Aaron T. Baier



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COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

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ATI & AAA Come Together for NY Connects Partnership

By Alison McCabe, Education Advocacy Coordinator

Established in 2006 by the New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) and the Department of Health, NY Connects is a free service that connects people to unbiased information about long-term services and supports in New York State. NY Connects can be utilized by people of all ages and with any type of disability, and acts as a one-stop shop for answers to questions from consumers, caregivers, and service providers. According to NYSOFA, there are currently 53 NY Connects programs in place across New York State. Here in Cortland County, the Cortland County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) and Access To Independence have come together as partners to offer the program locally.

The Cortland County AAA has administered the NY Connects program since 2006, and is the lead agency in the Partnership. When funding became available under the Affordable Care Act, Independent Living Centers – agencies like ATI – were added to the NY Connects network as part of a statewide “No Wrong Door” initiative. ATI joined the Partnership in 2017 after being invited to planning meetings by the AAA, prior to the official inclusion of Independent Living Centers. At that time both agencies anticipated an increase in demand for information about community-based services. In recent years, greater focus has been placed on these types of supports as a more economical way to pay for long-term care. Liz Haskins, Director of the Cortland County AAA and NY Connects, told ATI “People have the right to live in the setting of their choice, which – in most cases – is their own home.”

In addition to the AAA and ATI, there are a number of local organizations working together to support the implementation of NY Connects in Cortland County. These agencies include DSS, the Mental Health Department, OPWDD, Seven Valleys Health Coalition, and the Cortland County Health Department.

Since its inception, the NY Connects Partnership between the AAA and ATI has only continued to grow. “All community-based agencies as well as health care entities are undergoing significant systems changes, and the Partnership has provided support to both [the AAA and ATI],” said Haskins. She said some benefits of having the Partnership in place include providing coverage for the program, having the ability to educate a wider pool of professionals and community members, and being able to meet the increasing demand for services. Haskins noted that the two agencies specialize in different areas – for example, ATI primarily takes calls from people with disabilities and veterans, while the AAA focuses more on older adults – which allows each agency to draw on the expertise of the other. When asked what she envisions for the future of the Partnership, Haskins said she hopes to see continued growth for NY Connects, the development of a united voice for joint advocacy efforts, and an increase in community knowledge of the program as both agencies work together to empower people to live as independently as possible.

**For more information or answers to your long-term care questions, call NY Connects at:
756-3485 or 756-5060 Kathy Hammond, AAA | 423-0345 or 753-7363 Todd Simmons, ATI**



Supporting Choice: Home is Where You Decide

By Anne Marie Piche, Transition Specialist

At ATI, we believe that everyone has the right to live in the least restrictive environment possible. For many, that means being able to leave a nursing facility and return to independent living. Sometimes that means returning to a home that they share with a spouse or other family members after a period of rehabilitation, and other times it means finding new, accessible housing and organizing services to support the person's increasing physical needs. Regardless of what someone's situation looks like, a lot of coordinated effort is required to get them where they want to go.

Being a Transition Specialist with Access to Independence has certainly been one of the most rewarding roles I have ever been able to play. The successes I witness are inspiring – even more so because the challenges are often so complex. Being in a nursing facility can make it difficult to get information, make phone calls, and follow up on options. Especially if someone is dealing with a recent health crisis and rehabilitation, these additional tasks can often just be too much. It can be reassuring for someone I am meeting for the first time to know that as a Transition Specialist, I will help them to navigate the many – and often times, confusing – options that are available to them.

Here at ATI, we can help direct you to a variety of transition services including the Open Doors program, Accessibility Modifications, Benefits Counseling, and our durable medical equipment loan closet. Not sure which service or services you might benefit from? Give us a call and our staff will help point you in the right direction!

For more information about transition services, call Access to Independence at (607) 753-7363 and ask for Transition Specialist Anne Marie Piche. You can also reach Anne by email at apiche@aticortland.org.



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Growth Through Advocacy

By Alison McCabe, Education Advocacy Coordinator



Advocacy is one of ATI's Core Services. As an agency, we provide individual (personal) and systems (public policy) advocacy services in order to increase equal access for all.

Who can be an advocate? The answer is: anyone! If you are passionate about a particular subject—for example, your rights as a person with a disability—you're already halfway there. Chances are, you have performed advocacy work for yourself, a loved one, or a cause at some point without even knowing it.

I recently had the opportunity to interview Jarett Withers, an advocate who has been working and volunteering with ATI since 2011, about his experience with advocacy work and how it has shaped him.

Ally: You were part of ATI's advocacy trip to Albany on May 29, 2019. Have you done that type of work before?

Jarett: I've done some self-advocating, so things for my needs, and I've done other trips to Albany before this one, and one or more trips to D.C. On those trips we had meetings with legislators and other representatives. In the past we've touched on sheltered workshops and other things.

Ally: The theme of this quarter's newsletter is "growth." Are there skills have you grown, either personally or professionally, from doing advocacy work?

Jarett: I think advocacy has helped me get better at talking to people. I've discovered that I do best when I'm not working off of a script; when I'm given information ahead of time, verbally, and then I can kind of go with the flow and put in my own knowledge where it's relevant. It's also helped me learn how to have a more effective conversation, by not dominating the conversation and instead getting the key points out and making sure everyone else gets to put in their two cents, because that's important.

Ally: What advice would you give to someone who is new to advocacy work?

Jarett: Take it at whatever pace is comfortable for you, because even if you're only doing a little bit you're still making a difference. Maybe you'll work your way up to a trip to Albany, or maybe you'll focus more locally. It's all about using whatever your skills are, and also pushing yourself a little bit, because that's how you'll grow and get better.

Jarett can be seen in the photo at the top right corner of this page (back row, center). A group of advocates from ATI are pictured with Senator James Seward during Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day in Albany on 5/29.

For more information about ATI's advocacy efforts and how you can get involved, reach out to Ally:

(607) 753-7363 x200 | amccabe@aticortland.org



Above: Advocates in Albany with Senator James Seward (left)



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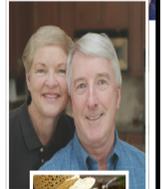


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ATI Continues to Grow

Please welcome our newest team members!



Jean Rightmire serves as Fund-raising & Grants Coordinator for ATI. Jean oversees grant and fund development initiatives that boost services for people with disabilities, including Agency fundraisers and donation campaigns.



Alison (Ally) McCabe serves as Education Advocacy Coordinator. Ally provides education and outreach services to the community, and also serves as ATI's Systems Advocate for disability rights on the local, state and national levels.



Karla Hoag serves as Program Assistant. Karla provides essential support to all Agency programs, including clerical support to the Accessibility Modification Program and assistance to the Agency's Craft Class.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

Craft Club

Every Wednesday, 10-11 AM

Coloring Club

Second Tuesday of every month!
Tuesday, September 10, 2-3:30 PM
Tuesday, October 8, 2-3:30 PM

Go-Getters Self-Advocacy Group

Second Friday of every month!
Friday, September 13, 3-4:00 PM
Friday, October 11, 3-4:00 PM

CNY Disability Support Group

Second Wednesday of every month!
Wednesday, September 11, 4-5:00 PM
Wednesday, October 9, 4-5:00 PM

COALITIONS

Taskforce to Increase Disability Employment (TIDE)

Tuesday, September 30, 10-11:00 AM
Tuesday, November 25, 10-11:00 AM
Tuesday, January 27, 2020, 10-11:00 AM

Emergency Preparedness Core Advisory Group (CAG)

Thursday, November 14, 11:00 AM-12:00 PM
Thursday, February 13, 2020, 11:00 AM-12:00 PM
Thursday, May 14, 2020, 11:00 AM-12:00 PM

Cortland County Housing Consortium

Tuesday, November 26, 8-10:00 AM
Tuesday, February 25, 2020, 8-10:00 AM
Tuesday, May 26, 2020, 8-10:00 AM

All events take place at ATI.
Call 753-7363 for more information!

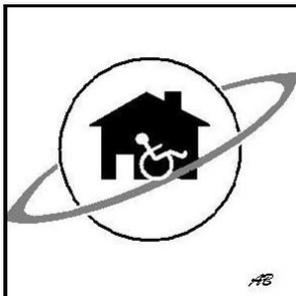

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Frances A. Pizzola









Honoring the Legacy



“Fran... always educating people to break down attitudinal barriers in her kind, thoughtful manner. Encouraging people with challenges to focus on what you can do... not what you cannot do!”

– Janet Oechsle, ATI Board Member



“Keep doing the good work.”

– Fran Pizzola

“I worked under [Fran] as an intern while attending TC3. She was a great mentor and taught me a lot about the community. When I first started interning at ATI, I didn't know much about the ADA, but Fran made sure that I read up on it and the history of ATI and why she founded it. I also worked with her on trying to get local businesses to deal with physical barriers on their properties. I loved working with her and she has inspired me to advocate for not only myself but for others with disabilities.”

– Tina Carden, ATI Board Member



“Fran spoke with some of my classes and some meetings of the Education Club. At those meetings, she was always upbeat and personable as she shared stories and insights with students in ways that helped them understand the relevance of inclusive thinking and action. I remember meeting with her at her ATI desk; she bubbled with ideas and offers of help... I remember a strong young woman who motivated my students and me.”

– John Suarez, Director, SUNY Cortland Institute for Civic Engagement

“Wow, after 17 years, there are so many things that stand out for me. Fran was a dedicated advocate, and she was always looking for ways to improve the lives of others with disabilities. She was very good at turning her road blocks into opportunities to teach others about discrimination and how unfair it was to judge someone by their disability. Above all, she loved her family and they loved her!”

– Susan Lewis, Independent Living Coordinator at ATI



“Over the past four years, Fran and I have had many intelligent talks... Fran talked, and I listened. But seriously: Fran would always end the conversation with ‘Keep doing the good work.’ ... I can assure you, Fran, that we are stronger than ever and will continue the ‘good work’ that you were so driven by and passionate about. You have made us who we are today and you should be very proud of yourself.”

– John Quinn, Senior Architectural Access Design Specialist at ATI