

The Future is
Accessible
for All People
with Disabilities

Access To Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

ACCESS NEWS

Spring 2020

Issue 62

Universal What?!

You may have noticed that you've been hearing the word "universal" from Access To Independence a lot lately! Everywhere we go, we've been talking about universal design, universal access, the Universal 5 + ½ K Race... so what's it all about?

When we say that something is "universal," we mean that it affects ALL people, including people with disabilities. Access To Independence aims to ensure that people with disabilities are included when we are talking about *everyone* in our community.

Here's what we envision for the future of accessibility: When we're building new houses and programs, let's make them universally designed from the start! And when aiming to improve the accessibility of an already-constructed space, make sure the redesign is set up for universal access.

When seeking to include *everyone* in a program, space, piece of technology, or event, help us ensure that people with all types of disabilities are part of the plan!



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QUARTERLY QUOTE

"Accessibility allows us to tap into everyone's potential."

- Debra Ruh, disability rights advocate and CEO of TecAccess

Access Adapts to Change for People with Disabilities



Dear Friends,

What a strange time we are living in! As you may have heard, Access To Independence is currently closed to the public as part of a statewide effort to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. Even though our doors are closed for the moment, ATI is still operational... and we are here for you.

As always, our dedicated staff are hard at work—they just happen to be doing that work from the safety of their own homes. Access To Independence is doing everything we can to ensure that you don't feel isolated during this time of social distancing. In case you haven't heard, we've created a temporary phone number that allows you to reach us while we're not physically in the office: **(607) 283-4881**.

Braedon will answer as usual, and he can help connect you to the staff person or resource you are looking for.

Did you have an in-person appointment scheduled for this week? Give us a call so we can make arrangements to hold your meeting by phone. Need a piece of equipment from our loan closet? We will do our best to schedule a contact-free pickup for you. ATI is committed to making sure people with disabilities, their families and caregivers are still getting what they need as we all work to navigate this new world we find ourselves in.

In times like these—when we are collectively facing something that we've never dealt with before—it's okay to feel afraid or unsure. But it's also important to remember that there are things we can do as a community to help ourselves feel better, and to make sure that our families, friends and neighbors are taken care of. For many of us, this is a unique opportunity to slow down and check in with ourselves and our loved ones. Take this time to dive into something you love, whether it's making art, practicing music, learning a new skill, or spending some time in the sun. Play a game with friends by mail, phone, or video chat. And if you need someone to talk to or you're just not sure where to turn, you can always reach out to us.

For those of you who are looking for a way to make a difference from home, this is also a crucial time for advocacy! Not only is the New York State Budget due on April 1, but our legislators have suddenly become unavailable for in-person meetings. In New York State, Medicaid funding is on the chopping block in front of the Governor's Medicaid Redesign Team (MRT II). If you want to help, you can contact your legislators by phone or email and let them know that the middle of a public health crisis is not the time to be making cuts to Medicaid! On the federal level, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (S.3548) is missing many of the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)'s priority items. To stay up to date on these and other advocacy issues, sign up for ATI's Education Alerts by sending us an email at info@aticortland.org.

We can't wait to see you all back at the office as soon as things return to normal... and they will. For the moment, I leave you with this: Stay home, stay safe, and stay strong!

Sincerely,
Aaron T. Baier, Executive Director



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Be Kind To Your Wallet at Tax Time with VITA Tax Services

By Raimona Rowe, Site Coordinator for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

Now that tax forms are coming out, a lot of people are looking for help with completing their tax returns. For the past several years, Access To Independence has partnered with the IRS and Alternatives Federal Credit Union to provide free tax services to the Cortland area every weekend during tax season. Individuals making less than \$57,000 can come to ATI with their picture identification, social security cards, and tax statements to have their taxes prepared for free. They will be asked to complete some paperwork to help us ensure their return is complete when we're preparing it. Anyone struggling with the paperwork is welcome to seek assistance from one of our friendly volunteers.

Once the paperwork is complete, your taxes will be prepared in ATI's on-site computer learning lab by a volunteer who has completed a class and passed a rather intense test. Anyone not passing the test is not allowed to prepare your returns. That way, we ensure a quality job is done the first time.

Because quality is very important to us, a quality review is completed after your return is prepared. Our quality reviewers have over thirty years' experience in tax preparation, and may ask a few questions to ensure a job well done. Once we've reviewed the return with you, we'll print you a copy. All returns—both federal and state—are e-filed after every shift.

Make more than \$57,000? Can't find your social security card? Don't want to do our intake paperwork? We have an assisted self-prepared option for you. You can set up an appointment or just stop by Access To Independence during our tax site hours and we can answer any questions you have while you're using tax software we provide to complete your return. You'll need to have some information from your last year's taxes in order to e-file, but you'll be able to skip all the paperwork. Taxpayers who have tried this system have been pleasantly surprised at how easy it is to do their own taxes for free.

I encourage everyone to try our service. The benefits go far beyond our great price! Although they may choose to, other tax preparers aren't legally required to take tests before preparing your taxes. In addition, I've never seen a professional preparer hand their return off to be checked by another capable preparer. Lastly, we will never reduce the amount of your refund. All the money due to you will be direct deposited or sent as a check straight from the treasury to you. We help you with your taxes without helping ourselves to your return!

As a preventive measure against COVID-19, VITA's services are currently on hold.

The deadline to submit state and federal income taxes has been pushed to July 15, 2020.

Keep an eye out for an announcement from ATI when VITA can resume services!

For the most up-to-date information, call 211 at (877) 211-8667.

Join the Race for Inclusion!

ATI to Host First Annual Universal 5 + ½ K in Fall of 2020



By Rachel Anderson,
RRCA Race Director & Accessibility
Modification Coordinator for ATI

Imagine a world where we could beam, or teleport, to places like they do in science fiction. If we could travel by instantly reappearing in some other location, then beaming would solve so many issues. We would not need elevators or cars or have to worry about driving in snow. Traveling to exotic places would be easy without layovers and lost luggage.

I would love to beam myself upstairs in my office building. As part of my disability, my legs do not always like to listen to my brain. I fall down sometimes, most frequently on stairs. In a world without beaming technology, the only way for me to avoid stairs is if my surroundings are universally designed.

Universal design is the concept that our surroundings should be made accessible for everyone. "Everyone" includes people with disabilities, people without disabilities, young children and older adults. While many people think of accessibility as eating out in restaurants and going shopping, people with disabilities also want to be included in recreation. We want to go to parks, walking trails, pools, baseball games and more.

The *Universal 5 + ½ K: Honoring our Founder, Frances A. Pizzola*, is an inclusive recreation event that will be happening this fall at Suggett Park in Cortland. Brought to you with generous support from Plan First Technologies, both events are open to everyone, with or without a disability. You can choose the 5K distance, which is 3.1 miles, or the half K distance, which is three-tenths of a mile. The half K is literally a walk in the park. All funds go toward universal design projects that make our community more accessible for everyone!

It takes a community to make our city and our county more accessible. We are in need of athletes, volunteers and spectators for this all-inclusive, family-friendly event! Registration for athletes is \$25. The original date of April 25 has been postponed due to COVID-19 concerns. Stay tuned for registration information later this summer as we move the Universal 5 + ½ K to the fall!

Volunteers are free, and we even give you a T-shirt. Call ATI at (607) 753-7363 if you would like to volunteer. This a great opportunity for groups to spend time together giving back to the community! We cannot hold this event without a small army of volunteers to support our athletes.

Spectators are also free! All you need to do is show up on race day with a smile to cheer on our athletes. Feel free to bring your lawn chair, cow bells, or even make a sign with a funny saying like "Worst Parade *Ever*." You can also stand and clap. Whether runners are seasoned or first-time athletes, we want to show our participants that we appreciate them running to make our community accessible!

Until beaming becomes a thing that is not just science fiction, we will walk, run and roll our way toward a future that is accessible for everyone! Come join us!

For more information on how you can get involved with the most fun event in Cortland this fall, contact Rachel Anderson at (607) 753-7363 or randerson@aticortland.org.

Refresh Your Home This Spring by Energizing, Prioritizing, and Organizing!

By Allyson Mooney,
Professional Organizer & Founder of *Lifestyle Organization*

You don't have to have noticeable clutter to **REFRESH** your home. You can create breathing room in your cabinets, drawers, closets and rooms! Everything in your home should be accessible to you; you shouldn't have to move anything to use what you need. Start small – like a kitchen cabinet – and keep what you use, replace old items, and put them within reach. Smaller, lighter items that you rarely use go in the tops of cabinets and bigger, heavier items should go in bottom cabinet spaces. The middle areas are for things you use on a regular basis.

Get **ENERGIZED** to refresh how you see your own space so you can make it more efficient and accessible! You can do this by only keeping what you use and like, and by creating zones within each area for storage and work. Keep counters clear by finding a place in your cabinets for everything so you can store it out of your way. Only keep items that you like that make you smile, and don't feel guilty if you get rid of items. Changing your decorating theme and/or colors is another easy, affordable way to refresh the atmosphere in your home.

PRIORITIZE your project list by deciding what you want to change first and what will allow you to progress through all your projects smoothly. Clean out first so you have less to organize. Then purchase items to organize so you have the correct number or size for your project. Before you get rid of items, check to see if you can repurpose items or use them in a different room. That table stuck in the corner could be relocated under a window to display plants.

Start **ORGANIZING** by sorting into boxes, bins, or bags labeled “keep,” “decide,” “donate,” “recycle,” “shred,” “garbage,” “give to friends and family,” or “goes in a different room.” Save time by waiting until the box is full, then put that box of items away, deliver boxes to family and friends, and drop off donations.

Sit back, relax, and enjoy your newly **REFRESHED** home!

Need a hand with getting organized?

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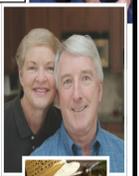


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Recent Events

Albany Legislative Days: January & February 2020



ABOVE: Volunteer advocates from ATI stand on marble steps in the Well of the Legislative Office Building on NYAIL's Budget Advocacy Day (February 10, 2020).



ABOVE: ATI volunteers and advocates from across New York State gather at the Capitol in support of the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program during NYAIL's Budget Advocacy Day on February 10, 2020.

Veterans Resource Fair: CNY Living History Center



ABOVE: NY Connects Coordinator Todd Simmons stands ready to talk with veterans at ATI's outreach table during Rep. Anthony Brindisi's Resource Fair on February 20, 2019.



ABOVE: Congressman Anthony Brindisi takes questions from Cortland County veterans and offers assistance with benefits issues following his office's Resource Fair.

ATI Executive Director Receives *Coffee Mania* Community Leadership Award



ABOVE: ATI Executive Director Aaron Baier accepts his award for Nonprofit Community Leader of the Year from Coffee Mania staff. One nomination: "Aaron never stops advocating for a future that is accessible for all people with disabilities." **Congratulations, Aaron!**



UPCOMING ACTIVITIES & EVENTS

Craft Club

Every Wednesday, 10-11 AM
POSTPONED UNTIL AT LEAST 4/15

Coloring Club

Second Tuesday of every month, 2-3:30 PM
POSTPONED UNTIL AT LEAST 4/15

Board Game Group

Second Thursday of every month, 12-1:30 PM
POSTPONED FOR APRIL

Words Have Power! Self-Advocacy Group

Second Friday of every month, 3-4 PM
POSTPONED FOR APRIL

CNY Disability Support Group

Second Wednesday of every month, 4-5 PM
POSTPONED FOR APRIL

COALITIONS

Taskforce to Increase Disability Employment (TIDE)

Tuesday, March 30, 10-11:00 AM: Canceled
Tuesday, May 25, 10-11:00 AM: TBD

Emergency Preparedness Core Advisory Group (CAG)

Thursday, May 14, 11:00 AM-12:00 PM: TBD
Thursday, August 13, 11:00 AM-12:00 PM

Cortland County Housing Consortium

Tuesday, May 26, 8-10:00 AM: TBD
Tuesday, August 25, 8-10:00 AM

Have a Question About Your Meeting?

Call (607) 283-4881 for more information!

Want to
Volunteer?



Call Us
Today!



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AS



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Keep up with
Everything Access!



The 2020 Census: Everyone Counts!

By Kate Dillon, Partnership Specialist with the U.S. Census Bureau

Shape
your future
START HERE >

United States®
Census
2020

The census is a count of every person who lives in the United States. The U.S. Constitution requires a census every 10 years. This year in 2020, the census will take place during the spring and summer months.

The 2020 Census is important. The information collected in the census is used by the government to determine political representation in Congress and to decide how to spend \$675 billion every year. Census data help fund important local programs and services many people rely on, like Medicaid, food and housing assistance, social security, public transportation, libraries, and education programs. By responding to the 2020 Census, you are fulfilling a civic duty and helping your community get the power and resources it needs to make life better for everyone.

The 2020 Census is safe. The census asks a few simple questions, like your name, age, sex, race, and how many people you live with in your home. Your responses to the 2020 Census are protected by law. Your answers can only be used to create statistics and are not shared with any government agencies, law enforcement officials, or courts. You cannot get in trouble for anything you put on the 2020 Census form.

The 2020 Census is accessible for everyone! There are three different ways to respond to the census and you can choose to answer the census questions by going online, by speaking to a census worker over the phone, or by filling out a paper form. The online questionnaire is accessible to people with a wide range of disabilities. There are guides, videos, and translations of the 2020 Census questions available at 2020CENSUS.GOV, including resources in large print, braille, and American Sign Language. If you do not respond to the census by May, a census worker will visit your home to ask you the census questions in person.

If you live alone, with family, or with roommates, you will get an invitation to respond to the census through the mail. Be sure to include everyone you live with when you respond to the 2020 Census, including young children, roommates, and anyone staying with you temporarily. If you live in a group home, census workers will work with someone from your building to make sure everyone is counted correctly. They may ask you to speak to a census worker directly or fill out a paper form.

If you have questions, concerns, or want to learn more about the census, visit 2020census.gov or email Kate at katherine.d.dillon@2020census.gov.

It's easy for you to be counted on the 2020 Census.

Beginning in mid-March 2020, you can respond to the census by answering a handful of questions online, by phone, or by mail.



The online questionnaire is accessible to people with a wide range of disabilities.



If you have deafness or a hearing loss, you can:



If you prefer to respond by mail but do not receive a questionnaire in your first mailing from the U.S. Census Bureau, you can wait for the fourth mailing, in mid-April 2020, which will include a questionnaire.

- › Respond to the census using telephone devices for hearing impaired.
- › Access video guides to the questionnaire in American Sign Language on 2020CENSUS.GOV.
- › View online videos and webcasts with closed or open captioning.
- › Request a visit from a census taker who uses American Sign Language.



If you have blindness or low vision, you can print a guide to the questionnaire in braille or large print from 2020CENSUS.GOV.

New York State Budget Advocacy Updates *By Ally McCabe, Education Advocacy Coordinator for ATI*

You may have heard that Access To Independence is part of a group called the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network, or SSAN. The SSAN was developed by the New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) to support Independent Living Centers like ATI with educating our communities about statewide issues impacting people with disabilities. At the beginning of each year, NYAIL provides us with guidance regarding the most pressing concerns facing the disability community. As the Systems Advocate for ATI, I want to give you an update about what we're focusing on for 2020!

The first half of every year is centered around budget advocacy. In January, the Governor releases his proposed budget for New York State, which outlines where all of our available dollars will be going. Sometimes there are cuts to certain programs or sectors, like supportive housing or Medicaid, in an attempt to save money for the State or for other portions of the budget.

Before the state budget is finalized on April 1, we have the opportunity to advocate for changes to be made! This period of time is crucial for Independent Living because we often find ourselves needing to oppose cuts or other unforeseen changes to areas of the budget that support home and community-based services or otherwise allow people with disabilities to live independently.

A few of this year's budget advocacy priorities include:

- *Increasing base funding for Independent Living Centers.* ILCs provide critical services for people with disabilities, and have been severely underfunded for the past fifteen years while the cost of providing services has increased dramatically. IL funds allow ATI to do what we do, and they need to be protected!
- *Opposing the Medicaid Redesign Team (MRT II) approach to cutting \$5 billion from Medicaid.* The Governor has re-assembled this MRT taskforce for the second time and directed them to find savings within the Medicaid program before April 1. Looking for savings (i.e. rooting out fraud/abuse) is not the issue here: it's the MRT process that is problematic. Members of the MRT are almost exclusively service providers—not Medicaid users—and there has been little opportunity for consumer input. The time crunch is also a concern.
- *Advocating that the Consumer-Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPA) be handled separately from the larger MRT II process.* CDPA is critical to Independent Living and much less expensive to provide than traditional home care/nursing home services, but is being blamed for much of the growth in Medicaid expenses. ATI would encourage the State to allow for a more thoughtful approach to finding savings in CDPA.

To stay informed about issues affecting the disability community, sign up for ATI Education Alerts by contacting Ally at (607) 753-7363 or amccabe@aticortland.org.

Be On the Lookout for Fake Social Security Calls!

Have you ever received a threatening call from someone claiming to be someone you trust, like a government official? Have you been asked for your Social Security Number or other personal information? These calls are not from Social Security! There are many telephone scams happening now, with the goal of tricking you into sharing your personal information and money. Don't be fooled!

Sometimes, scammers pretend they're from Social Security. The number you see on caller ID may even look like an official government number, but it's not. The caller may say there is a problem with your Social Security number or account or ask you to give them personal information like your Social Security Number or bank account. They may tell you that you must pay a fine using retail gift cards, pre-paid debit cards, wire transfers or cash to fix the problem or to avoid arrest.

These calls are **not** from Social Security! Use these tips to help you protect yourself.

Social Security will not: Threaten you, tell you that your Social Security Number has been or might be suspended, call you to demand an immediate payment, ask you for credit or debit card numbers over the phone, require a specific means of debt repayment, like a pre-paid debit card, a retail gift card, or cash; demand that you pay a Social Security debt without the ability to appeal the amount you owe; promise a Social Security benefit approval, or increase, in exchange for information or money; or request personal or financial information through email, text messages, or social media.

Social Security will: Sometimes call you to confirm you filed for a claim or to discuss other ongoing business you have with them; mail you a letter if there is a problem; mail you a letter with detailed information about options to make payments and the ability to appeal the decision if you need to submit payments; use emails, text messages, and social media to provide general information (not personal or financial information) on its programs and services if you've signed up to receive these messages.

If you receive a suspicious call from someone who says they are from Social Security, please: Hang up right away! Never give them your personal information, money, or retail gift cards. Report the scam at oig.ssa.gov/ to Social Security's law enforcement team at the Office of the Inspector General (OIG).

***If you're not sure if a call or piece of mail is from Social Security,
call 1-800-772-1213 or 1-800-325-0778 (TTY) to check.***

*You can learn more about how to spot scam calls from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.
Scams are constantly changing, but you can protect yourself by knowing what to look out for.
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The Section 8 Housing Program helps qualified people meet their monthly rent bills by paying a portion of their rent directly to their landlord.

Interested persons may pick up applications at the Housing Authority offices located at
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We have senior/disabled **efficiency** and **one bedroom** apartments located in the City of Cortland. We also have **one bedroom** senior/disabled units in Homer, McGraw, Marathon, Truxton and Cincinnatus.

Our large family apartments (3, 4 and 5 bedrooms) are located in the City of Cortland. We also **two and three bedroom** family apartments scattered throughout the county in Homer, Truxton, McGraw, Cincinnatus and the City of Cortland.

There are short waiting lists for apartments in most of our developments.

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