

The Future is
Accessible
for All People
with Disabilities

Access To Independence of Cortland County, Inc.

ACCESS NEWS

Fall 2020

Issue 63

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS #THANKYOUADA

The year 2020 marks the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, also known as the ADA. The ADA is an historic piece of legislation that made discrimination on the basis of disability illegal in the United States for the first time. Specifically, the ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in areas like employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications, and access to state and local government programs and services. Without the ADA, people with disabilities would not have many of the rights that we do today. And while we celebrate the ADA as a critical part of our nation's history and our present-day lives, we still have plenty of work to do to ensure that the future is accessible for all people with disabilities.

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QUARTERLY QUOTE

"The ADA is a living testament to our nation's commitment that we will always stand up for our neighbors' right to live fulfilling lives."

- Senator Tammy Duckworth,
U.S. Army Veteran

The Future is Accessible... When People with Disabilities Have Options



Dear Friends,

One of the most fundamental principles of the independent living philosophy, which drives the mission of Access to Independence, is that people with disabilities are included in all aspects of life and have the same choices as people without disabilities. When choices are limited by disability, poverty, race, gender, or other life circumstance, our independence shrinks. Our ability to live life with freedom and equity disappears with those options.

The lack of equitable options for people is one factor that leads to systemic oppression. One example of this is people with disabilities being forced into nursing facilities and trapped by their life circumstances. When a person enters a nursing facility, it is often for purposes of rehabilitation or temporary need. They have no other choice but to receive that care in the facility. Once they are there, they learn that they will not be able to leave because their home is not accessible, or they lost their apartment while in the facility. They had no choice but to remain in the facility. These individuals would be doomed to live the rest of their lives trapped without their freedom to live independently without the options required to leave.

Often the choices available to people with disabilities are further limited by poverty. This means that money often affords people more choices. If the person forced into congregate care had the financial resources, they may have been able to purchase alternative in-home care or purchase the equipment to make their own home accessible and then leave the nursing facility. Similarly, people with disabilities and people living in poverty are more prone to health issues such as obesity, diabetes and other health complications. Healthy foods, gym and personal trainer services, and other healthcare add-ons cost money that many people just do not have.

The nature of the private sector of business is that goods and services are subject to exclusion. This is a defining difference between private and public sectors. When critical and essential goods and services are kept from people who need them, the government often steps in to help ensure their availability. Without public services, people with disabilities, people living in poverty, and other disenfranchised groups will be intentionally excluded from participation in society.

Fortunately, our community is beginning to see the value in public services. We offer programs to help parents get food for their families, offer essential healthcare to people in poverty, offer transportation to people without personal vehicles. Access to Independence offers choices to people living in nursing facilities, offers options to make homes accessible and offers a megaphone for people to voice their needs when they have run out of options.

These services are not universal. They do not meet the needs of all people who are marginalized. Access to Independence envisions a future where discrimination and physical barriers no longer exist. This means a future where the essential choice to live independently is not subject to exclusionary practices. Indeed, the future is accessible when people with disabilities have options.



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What is Cortland County Doing to Prevent Suicide?

By Sam Adams, Program Coordinator for the Cortland LGBTQ Center
& Co-Chair of SPEAK UP Cortland

According to statewide data from 2015-2017, Cortland County has the second highest death rate due to suicide compared to neighboring counties of Chenango (which has the highest in the area), Madison, Broome, Tioga, Tompkins, Cayuga, and Onondaga.

Spurred by these data, the Community Services Board recognized the need for a local coalition to reduce suicide deaths in our community. Local educators, health and human services employees, medical and mental health professionals, and community volunteers came together to form a suicide prevention coalition for our county, now called *SPEAK UP Cortland*.

SPEAK UP stands for "Suicide Prevention, Education, Awareness, Knowledge, Understanding, and Perseverance," but it's also a reminder of one of the key components of suicide prevention: breaking the silence around mental health and thoughts of suicide. The coalition is working to create an environment where people feel comfortable talking about their struggles and seeking necessary and life-saving health care.

What will this look like? Through educational trainings, the coalition aims to create a community that is comfortable talking about mental health and encourages individuals to seek appropriate mental health care without judgement or stigma. The coalition will also work with local agencies and organizations to include suicide prevention messaging with all gun-related trainings and licensures and partner with drug take back events to reduce access to lethal means.

Co-chairs Sam Adams (Program Coordinator for the Cortland LGBTQ Center) and Patricia Schaap (SPOA Coordinator located at the Cortland County Mental Health Clinic) shared: "In addition to providing suicide prevention trainings for community members and implementing strategies to increase access to mental health resources, we're committed to working with county stakeholders to expand data collection efforts. Collecting more inclusive demographic data will allow our coalition to better assess which communities face disproportionate suicide risks and develop targeted prevention strategies."

As efforts roll out over the coming months, there are things community members can do. *SPEAK UP Cortland* has presenters trained in *Talk Saves Lives: A Brief Introduction to Suicide Prevention* which was developed by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Community organizations, businesses, and groups can schedule a training by contacting Sam at sadams@familycs.org. Already have the basics covered? SPEAK UP can also schedule more in-depth trainings – contact us to discuss your needs and availability.

**If you or someone you know is experiencing thoughts of suicide,
please contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255.**

You can also call our local line at (607) 756-3771 or text HOME to 741741.

Service Animals vs. Emotional Support Animals

*By Susan Lewis,
Independent Living Coordinator*

There seems to be a lot of confusion regarding what service animals are and how they differ from support animals. I am going to try and clear up that confusion.

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a service animal is “a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability.” Tasks performed can include pulling a wheelchair, retrieving dropped items, alerting a person to a sound, reminding a person to take medication, or pressing an elevator button, among many other things. A service animal is usually purchased from an organization that trains them for specific tasks. They are considered working dogs until they retire from service. In certain circumstances, the ADA recognizes miniature horses as service animals also.

Emotional support animals, comfort animals, and therapy dogs are not service animals under Title II and Title III of the ADA. A note from a doctor or a certificate from an internet site does not make an animal a service animal as defined by the ADA. Support animals can provide companionship, relieve loneliness, and sometimes help with depression, anxiety, and certain phobias, but they do not have special training to perform tasks that assist people with other types of disabilities.

Here are a few examples of a trained service dog:

- A guide dog that assists a person with a vision disability to navigate their surroundings
- A hearing or signal dog that alerts a person with hearing loss when certain sounds occur such as a knock at the door or the phone ringing
- A psychiatric service dog that assists in detecting the onset of psychiatric episodes and lessens their effects. This could include reminding them to take medications, providing safety checks, or turning on lights for people with PTSD
- A sensory signal dog that is trained to assist a person with autism by recognizing and distracting from repetitive movement such as hand flapping
- A seizure response dog that will assist a person with a seizure disorder by alerting them to the oncoming seizure, guarding them during the seizure, or going for help

There are many sites on the internet that will send you a certificate that states that your animal is considered a “service” animal, but the animal will still not be covered under the ADA if a person takes it to court. A doctor can justify the use of a support animal and it won't cost you anything, but just remember that the support animal may not always be allowed the same accommodations as a service dog.

Most businesses will accommodate both a service animal and a support animal. The difference is, businesses **HAVE** to accommodate service dogs under the law, but they can choose not to accommodate support animals in certain situations.

Both service dogs and support animals are required to be under the control of their handler at all times. If a service dog or other support animal is aggressive, barking excessively, or running away from its handler, the business can ask the person to leave without repercussions.

If you are still unsure of your rights regarding a service dog or a support animal, give Sue a call at 753-7363 and she will work with you to help you understand the difference.

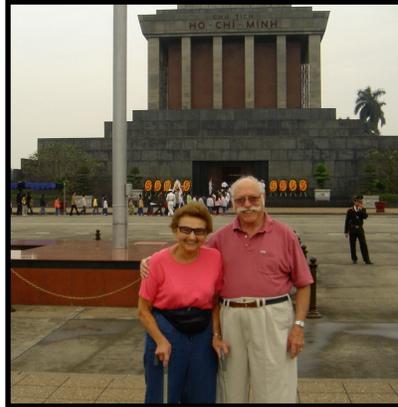
Grams' Story

By Sherry Lewis, Finance Manager

The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed 30 years ago, in 1990. My mother had back surgery in 1997 that left her disabled. She progressed to walking with two canes. In 2001, our youngest son, Eric, chose to write about my mother's "non-disability" in an assignment to write about someone you admired. This is what Eric wrote.



Above: Pauline Lewis (Grams) in Vietnam



Above: Pauline & Harvey Lewis



Above: Pauline & Harvey Lewis

My grandmother has triumphed over back surgery gone wrong, which has left her walking with two canes. Grams (my grandmother) has always traveled around the world and still does – even with her disability.

Since her surgery she has been to and walked on the Great Wall of China, and traveled from Chile to Tierra del Fuego, through all the rainforests, and waddled with the penguins. She has gone to South Africa, surviving through the heat and the brush, she's journeyed into the animals' habitats so she could get close-up pictures of lions, elephants, giraffes, and other big cats. In this year, Grams has traveled to Hawaii and spent two wondrous weeks with her four energetic grandchildren. She has toured in Japan and Korea with the Royal Ontario Museum.

All through her life, my grandmother has shown determination in her quest to learn and see other cultures and not let adversity stand in her way.

Without the passage of the ADA, my mother would not have been afforded the opportunity to participate and thrive in the things she loved doing: traveling, teaching, and learning. We need to continue to strengthen the ADA so that all people with disabilities continue to enjoy the universal access and non-discrimination guaranteed under it.



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ATI & Friends Say #ThanksToTheADA



Image above: Ben Ackley talking with light brown hair, glasses, and a light blue shirt.

“Hi! My name is Ben Ackley and I am a current content creator on YouTube under the name AckleyAttack4427 for almost 12 years now and I am a current intern for Access To Independence. I want to share with all of you how the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA for short, has made an impact on me... I do feel that a lot of people with disabilities are being more welcomed in our everyday environment and I want that path to continue on for many years to come. I think ever since the day I was diagnosed with high-functioning autism—ever since I was a little kid—I know I’m about to embrace it more and more during my adulthood growing up. Happy 30th anniversary and a big special thank you to the ADA for making me who I am today!”

“When I was a child, I noticed the potential impact guide dogs provided as a path to independence. Often, I heard the stories of businesses and companies denying access to service dog users. With all the doors closed to the disability community, it was imperative that change was needed. And change happened! On July 26, 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act into law. This day changed everything! Finally, getting a guide dog would lead to my independence. While things are definitely better, we still have much to improve for our full inclusion, representation, and equality. But now we are headed in that direction.” Image at right: Maria Mucaria & black lab guide dog crossing the street. Maria wears sunglasses, a black T-shirt & jeans.



“Happy 30th birthday, ADA! I think the main thing I think about the ADA is the fact that it has helped me over the last twenty years help folks with disabilities become more independent because they have the ADA behind them. It makes a huge difference for folks that there are actually laws now that protect their rights for people with disabilities, and I think that’s probably the thing that I like the best about it. So happy birthday! And hopefully it keeps growing strong for many years to come.”

Image to the left: Sue Lewis smiling in an office with short light hair, glasses and a striped shirt. There are framed photos behind her and to the left is an open door.



Image above: Aaron Baier holding an iPhone & wearing a black The Future is Accessible shirt.

AARON: Hey VoiceOver! What is the ADA?

SIRI: The Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990 as a comprehensive civil rights law that prohibits discrimination of people with disabilities. The law applies to employment (Title I), Public Services (Title II), Public Accommodations (Title III), Telecommunications (Title IV), and other areas covered under Title V.

AARON: You know, as a blind person, assistive technology has really helped me to feel more independent.

SIRI: That is wonderful to hear, Aaron. But did you know that millions of people still can't access the technology they need to be independent?

AARON: Assistive technology IS more widely available, but it's still very expensive. And so many people just... they still don't have access to the internet!

SIRI: Yes, it is sad that I can't talk to all of those people. While technology is improving the lives of so many, we need to ensure that all people can access and use these technologies.

AARON: Sure—Universal Design would make it so that all people can access and use the technologies they need, and it would ensure that people who need broadband access can get it!

SIRI: I help a lot of people remember important job tasks, help with managing medication, and help people stay healthy. But I can't do this as well if I can't access the internet.

AARON (TO AUDIENCE): This year we're celebrating 30 years of the Americans with Disabilities Act. We ask that you join us in celebrating the growth and accessibility of telecommunications.

SIRI: And we also ask that more focus is put on making telecommunications and assistive technology available to every single person who needs it!

"To me, the ADA means a chance to live life the way I want to. Also the opportunity to make changes if I want to. Just because you have a disability, you're not shoe-horned into a position. It's not... 'this is where you have to stay.' Ten years ago, I had the physical—my knees—that made it very tough for me to do much else. And three or four years ago I was diagnosed with some mental issues. But today I've turned it a completely different way from a guy who was doing physical labor to now serving on two Boards of Directors here in Cortland and doing more mental instead of physical work. A positive thing in my life right now is the fact... that I'm able to live. By myself. In my own place. You know? Without any fear of losing it. Basically, that's it—to live free."



Image above: Larry Woolheater sits smiling on a couch wearing a yellow hat and a blue button-down shirt with jeans. To the left is a red cane.

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BENEFITS UPDATES

from Susan Lewis, Independent Living Coordinator

For more information about any of the following, give Sue a call at 753-7363.

Beware of Scams to Steal Your Money or Identity

Scammers are still hard at work trying to get the public to either give up their money or their personal information. Below are some of the scams out there right now with tips to help you avoid them!

NEWEST SCAMS:

- People have reported ads on Facebook and WhatsApp that look like they are from large corporations promising help during the pandemic. This help could be grants, food vouchers or other giveaways. These are all scams to get your personal information. Never give your personal information to anyone over the phone unless you know that the call is legitimate!
- Companies are claiming that they have a “cure” for COVID 19. These are false claims to get you to buy their products.
- Scammers are calling people claiming that they are contact tracers alerting you to a possible COVID 19 exposure. Legitimate tracers will not ask for money, your social security number or your immigration status.
- Bogus claims to help you get your stimulus payments. This is a scam to get your personal information.

OLDER SCAMS (STILL CIRCULATING):

- “You have won, now pay us before you can get your money!” There are no legitimate sweepstakes that will make you pay upfront before getting your prize. You also cannot win something if you have not signed up for it.
- “You owe the IRS,” “student loans,” or “credit card debt” and you are pressured to send the caller gift cards. There are no agencies that will ask for gift cards as repayment. Just hang up!
- Companies promising to lower your credit card debt. Most of these are scams to get your money. There are legitimate non-profit agencies that can help with credit card debt, but they will not contact you, you will need to contact them.
- Work from home scams. There are many of these out there, and it is hard to tell which ones are legitimate. Legitimate work from home opportunities will not ask you for money to do the job. Always check out these opportunities with the Better Business Bureau or Google the job to see what others say about it.

These are just some of the ways that scammers will try and get money or information from you. A good rule of thumb is that “if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.” Another thing to remember is that most government agencies will not cold call you and ask for personal information or payment with gift cards. The IRS, SSA and other agencies will send you letters first unless you have called them!

Social Security Announces 1.3 Percent Benefit Increase for 2021

Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for approximately 70 million Americans will increase 1.3 percent in 2021, the Social Security Administration announced today.

The 1.3 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) will begin with benefits payable to more than 64 million Social Security beneficiaries in January 2021. Increased payments to more than 8 million SSI beneficiaries will begin on December 31, 2020. (Note: some people receive both Social Security and SSI benefits). The Social Security Act ties the annual COLA to the increase in the Consumer Price Index as determined by the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Some other adjustments that take effect in January of each year are based on the increase in average wages. Based on that increase, the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security tax (taxable maximum) will increase to \$142,800 from \$137,700.

Social Security and SSI beneficiaries are normally notified by mail starting in early December about their new benefit amount. Most people who receive Social Security payments will be able to view their COLA notice online through their personal *my Social Security* account. People may create or access their *my Social Security* account online at www.socialsecurity.gov/myaccount.

Information about Medicare changes for 2021, when announced, will be available at www.medicare.gov. For Social Security beneficiaries receiving Medicare, Social Security will not be able to compute their new benefit amount until after the Medicare premium amounts for 2021 are announced. Final 2021 benefit amounts will be communicated to beneficiaries in December through the mailed COLA notice and *my Social Security's* Message Center.

When to Join a Medicare Advantage Plan or Prescription Drug Plan

It's important for you to know when to sign up for Medicare or when to join a Medicare plan. Remember these times so you get the most out of your Medicare and avoid late enrollment penalties!

Initial Medicare Enrollment Period: Most people get Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance) and Part B (Medical Insurance) during this period. It starts 3 months before you turn 65 and ends 3 months after you turn 65. If you're not already collecting Social Security benefits before your Initial Enrollment Period starts, you'll need to sign up for Medicare online or contact Social Security.

To get the most from your Medicare and avoid the Part B late enrollment penalty, complete your Medicare enrollment application during your Initial Enrollment Period. This lifetime penalty gets added to your monthly Part B premium, and it goes up the longer you wait to sign up.

General Medicare Enrollment Period: If you miss your Initial Enrollment Period, you can sign up during Medicare's General Enrollment Period (January 1–March 31), and your coverage will start July 1.

Special Enrollment Period: Once your Initial Enrollment Period ends, you may have the chance to sign up for Medicare during a Special Enrollment Period (SEP). You can sign up for Part A and or Part B during an SEP if you have.

The best time to join a Medicare Health or Drug Plan is when you first get Medicare. Signing up when you're first eligible can help you avoid paying a lifetime Part D late enrollment penalty. If you miss your first chance, generally you have to wait until fall for Medicare's annual Open Enrollment Period (October 15–December 7) to join a plan. During this time each year, you can also drop or switch your plan coverage.

WANT TO JOIN?

COVID-19 Support Group

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

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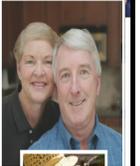


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