

# Every Day is Independence Day

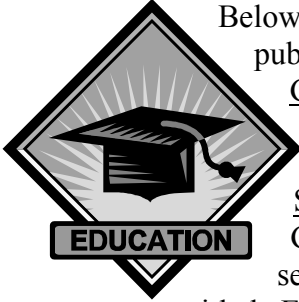
Spring 2009

Catskill Center for Independence

## Be Prepared!

*Jade Pendolf – Vocational Services Manager*

Seeing as how the school year is almost over, I thought it would be a good time to talk about being prepared for transition from high school to college.



Below is a section from the publication Be Prepared! Guiding Students With Disabilities Through Transition From High School to College by D. Gephart and S. LaRue. This section is included in a booklet

titled Effective Transitioning from High School to College: A Guide for Students with Disabilities.

The numbers are in. More and more students with disabilities are attending college, but this doesn't mean that getting there is any easier. The transition from high school to college is a difficult one for most students, but it is much harder for students with disabilities. Years of depending on parents as advocates, following individualized education plans (IEP) and determining rights and services under the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) come to a halt once you leave high school.

As a college bound student with a disability there are 3 issues that you need to understand in order to easily transition into your new learning environment.

1. **The accommodation process.** Every college has different policies and procedures for receiving accommodations, but in order to receive your accommodations you must notify the Office of Disability Support Services of your disability and provide the required documentation.
2. **The change in laws.** Students attending college are no longer covered under IDEA. Students must understand the differences between IDEA and ADA.

3. **Advocacy.** From kindergarten through high school, students with disabilities rely on their parents and the school to do everything from identifying the disability to providing the necessary programming. At the college level you will be assuming the advocacy role formally held by your parents.

The purpose of this booklet is to help you move from high school to college with fewer anxieties. In the section, "Know the Laws," you and your parents are alerted to the differences in parent/student rights found at the two different academic settings. This guide also supplies information on how to arrange for academic support services through submitting complete documentation. Additionally, in this handbook you will find worksheets designed to help you examine your study habits, life skills, and learning styles.

With the greater focus today on higher education and better outcomes for all students, the transition of students with disabilities to post secondary education can be a beacon of success and excellence.

If you would like more information or a copy of the booklet Effective Transitioning from High School to College: A Guide for Students with Disabilities. Please contact me at 607-432-8000.

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This is the amount of earnings that Jane will have her SSI payment reduced by for that month. Some people say, "Well, now I am only going to get \$390 a month for my SSI!" But, Jane will also get the \$865 a month in gross earnings plus any employment benefits offered by the employer. In New York State she will get her Medicaid as long as she still qualifies for SSI even if she no longer receives an SSI check due to earnings and she is on her way to becoming independent and self-sufficient. No dollar amount of value can be put on a person's independence!

The Catskill Center for Independence offers a Social Security program called Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA). This program can assist people who receive SSDI and/or SSI, and who are either actively seeking employment or already have a job, and want to know exactly how work will affect what they get each month. There are many parts of the program in place to reduce earnings even more, such as a large variety of work incentives like Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE's) that allow a person to deduct some medical expenses such as co-pays from wages, and the Plan for Achieving Self-Support or PASS Program that allows a person to set aside money towards an employment goal such as tuition, a computer, career training, or even a car!

People who receive SSDI and/or SSI *can* go to work without the worry of being left out in the cold without substantial means to live and survive. We at the Catskill Center want to help people do more than just survive. We want to assist *you* to become independent and self-sufficient!

Contact us on the WIPA Phone Line at 1-866-724-8666 or e-mail us at [ccfi@ccfi.us](mailto:ccfi@ccfi.us).

## Advocacy for Cancer Patients and their Families in Central New York



*Rina Riba – Independent Living Specialist*

For many people faced with a cancer diagnosis, dealing with health care providers may be only part of the story. Other things may come up which require legal advice or assistance, such as issues with medical bills, access to services like public assistance, Medicare, or Medicaid, housing, divorce, or child custody.

The Cancer Legal Advocacy and Services Project (CLASP) is a project of Legal Services of Central New York, Inc. and the Frank H. Hiscock Legal Aid Society, which are non-profit agencies located in Syracuse. It focuses on clients who have low incomes, but is not limited to them. Counties served by it include Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego, Otsego, St. Lawrence, Tioga, and Tompkins.

The purpose of the program is to provide a range of legal assistance to cancer patients. Services include help with access to health care and with insurance issues, including denials or terminations of benefits; assistance with housing issues; preparation of health care proxies and advance medical directives; estate planning and will preparation; arranging for care and custody of minor children; family law issues; and referrals to other agencies for needed services.

For further information, call 315-475-3127 and ask for the CLASP program or write to them at:

Legal Services of Central New York  
472 S. Salina Street, Suite 300  
Syracuse, NY 13202

Check out our web site  
[www.ccfi.us](http://www.ccfi.us)



**NYS HAVA Update:**  
**One Step Forward, Two Steps Back**  
*Helen Benlisa - Project HAVA Coordinator*

The 94<sup>th</sup> Annual Election Commissioner’s Association (ECA) winter conference was held at the Otesaga Hotel in Cooperstown, NY, this past January. Members of the State Board of Elections (SBOE) had an opportunity to address the county commissioners about the status of voting machine certification and the overall implementation plan for this year. At that time, there was uncertainty as to when the certification process and other necessary steps will be complete and the county commissioners were encouraged to prepare again for deploying the ballot marking devices (BMD) as well as the lever machines.

The hold up of the certification process was due to the loss of the testing lab’s federal accreditation. SysTest, the company hired by SBOE to examine the voting machines/ballot scanners NY will be using, lost their federal licensing when the US Election Assistance Commission (EAC), the federal agency overseeing HAVA implementation throughout the country, found problems with SysTest’s procedures and documentation practices. As of early March, SysTest’s accreditation has been renewed and testing should resume shortly. While that is good news, the bad news is some SysTest employees were let go during this whole process. Since the company couldn’t conduct business, they had no income to pay their workers.

When the testing gets completed, machine vendors can then resume their manufacturing schedule. If all goes well the counties could receive their orders by August, still cutting it close for the purposes of training and other logistical concerns. Still, there is no guarantee of all this coming off without a hitch.



During the conference, some commissioners raised concerns about the fiscal impact of again deploying two types of machines in the upcoming election which, being an off year, would be sure to see low voter turnout. A number of counties supported the idea of returning to Plan B status, whereby each county would deploy a single BMD. Some election officials suggested a compromise of at least several BMDs distributed throughout each county; one for each town was another compromise offered.

This argument was made because the numbers the commissioners referred to indicated overall low usage of the BMDs. However, issues such as poor timing of machine deployment which in turn severely restricted adequate poll worker training on use of the BMDs, lack of voter education and outreach by the county BOEs, late rollout of voter education website by the SBOE and the clear evidence of poll workers actively turning people away from using BMDs on Election Day, were not part of the discussion. At least one member of the State Board stated they could not support the request to return to Plan B due to the court order as well as it being in direct conflict with implementation of federal law, i.e., illegal. It is all too likely this year’s implementation schedule could be a replay of the 2008 BMD roll out, complete with inadequate poll worker training and lack of voter education.

On another front, there is currently a movement afoot throughout the state urging legislators at the county and state levels to allow NY to keep lever machines. The argument some are making is that with the deployment of BMDs in each polling site, the accessibility requirements of HAVA are met. Many people in the disability community are concerned with the problem of segregation. Having two separate voting systems sets up a range of complications: BMDs being relegated to an inaccessible area of the polling site; poll workers remaining inadequately trained on the functions and use of the BMDs and, therefore, not

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promoting its use; poll workers continuing to practice discrimination at the instruction of their supervisors or commissioners, asking invasive and illegal questions of voters wishing to use the BMDs, in a sense, making them prove they are “disabled enough”; and lack of voter education and outreach. The BOEs seem to have developed a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy when it comes to informing the public about the existence of BMDs at polling sites.

One point of the paper ballot with optical scanner (PBOS) machine, the voting system New York took these last few years to decide upon, is to indeed have a verifiable paper trail. While a paper trail is not at this point a requirement of HAVA, it does require the voter be able to verify their vote before they cast their ballot. A lever machine can not do that. In the event of a discrepancy, there would be hard copy ballots to recount, a reassurance for those who feel it is a security risk to not have some sort of back up. That is not possible with the lever machines; there is no paper trail. Another long term problem with lever machines is that they have ceased to be manufactured. Finding replacement parts and knowledgeable technicians will only become more difficult as the next hundred years goes by.



### **Free Screen Reader**

*Charles Reichardt – Systems Advocate*

Hardly an educational or work environment exists in our society today that does not make use of the enormous power of the Internet and computer technologies. Through such technologies various types of hardware and software have been developed to compensate for barriers faced by users with disabilities. People with disabilities, senior citizens, educators, students and helping professionals can now identify assistive and adaptive devices that can increase independence, facilitate education, and improve the quality of life

for everyone. Traditionally, software such as a screen reader or screen magnifier has been quite costly and as a result, out of the reach of most persons with disabilities. Until now that is!

The Serotek Corp. has recently unveiled a new program, Keys for K-12, which allows students who are visually impaired to have computer access by providing Serotek's System Access Mobile software for text-to-speech screen reading and/or screen magnification at no charge. Serotek provides a free license to carry the capability on a U3-enabled USB thumb drive so students can plug the drive into any computer anywhere and have instant access to all resident Windows-based and Microsoft Office applications such as Word, Excel and PowerPoint. When unplugged, no trace of usage is left behind on the host computer.

The license is renewable every year until the student's 18th birthday or graduation from high school. Blind students can complete the online eligibility form at [www.serotek.com/kk12.html](http://www.serotek.com/kk12.html), which also requires certification of visual impairment from a medical or educational professional. Once having done so, they can follow the simple steps to download the software to a USB drive.

Serotek has also announced the development of a new interactive access technology podcast named Serotalk, found at <http://serotalk.com/> which is both a podcast and blog where participants discuss ways people use assistive technology to improve their quality of life.

The website, podcast and blog will offer a wealth of information on new technologies, useful websites, cool software, education, information and entertainment. Podcast listeners won't have to wait for each episode to air in order to keep up with the latest happenings in the accessible digital world. Listeners can read and comment on the Serotalk blog, send e-mail to [resources@serotalk.com](mailto:resources@serotalk.com), and even leave voicemails on the toll-free Serotalk line at (866) 997-2522. In this way, listeners can shape the direction of the podcast by sharing their digital lifestyle experiences.

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This article does not in any way represent an endorsement by the Catskill Center for Independence of the Serotek Keys for K-12 program or any other product and is published for informational purposes only. The aim is to share with those who might not otherwise have access to such information the knowledge of the availability of free screen reading and magnification software for students K – 12.

### Computer Classes

If you are interested in learning a little something about using computers or surfing the “Net”, please call Meghan at the Center to sign up. Spaces and times will be limited, so don’t hesitate to call us at 607-432-8000, or email us at [ccfi@ccfi.us](mailto:ccfi@ccfi.us)

## Preparedness is the Key to Lifelong Independence

*Don Wyckoff – Architectural Barrier Consultant*

After almost 5 years here at the Catskill Center for Independence, I have conducted many on-site assessments. In that time I have come to realize there is a huge need for on-site assessments and home modifications in our three county service area. What strikes me more is the even larger need for the *basic information* regarding home accessibility.

Often I see people in their mid 40’s and 50’s who are buying new homes with large granite steps or beautiful wooden staircases leading to huge decks. While these homes may seem a perfect fit for them now, eventually it may be considered inaccessible to them in the event of a temporary or permanent disability. It’s discouraging how often I get calls from folks who sadly never thought a disability could find them. They believed they were too young or in too good of shape for something so unfortunate to happen to them.

I also frequently receive calls from family members saying their disabled parents or friends are coming to visit, but they have steps leading into their homes and they’re concerned their relatives will not be able to visit. Even more discouraging is when I tell

them it could be 6 months or more before they get the modifications they need. This is usually due to lack of funding or contractor availability, yet it always underscores the same point: do not assume disability won’t find you, plan ahead now!

And so it is for this reason I have included some basic information regarding universal design and visit-ability. As you read the tips and suggestions think of your own homes or the homes of your family and friends and then consider whether or not the homes would be accessible or visit-able to someone with a disability. The only chance we have to be prepared is to be informed, so if you can, spread the word!

### Tips to consider when designing or modifying your home (based on current ADAAG Standards)

#### Exterior Tips

- Ensure the path leading to the entrance is a level, firm, slip resistant surface.
- At least one entrance of the home is accessible from ground level.
- Install a motion activated outdoor lighting system.
- Ensure the entrance door provides a minimum clear width of 32” with the door opened at 90 degrees.



#### Interior Tips

##### *Cabinets and Countertops*

- Build countertops at varying heights for different tasks. Lower counter tops provide the option to sit while preparing and cooking meals. The recommended height is 28" - 32" with a maximum height of 34”.
- Create pullout work surfaces such as counters, breadboards and cutting boards for access from a chair. Drawers with fully extendable glides are easier to get into.



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- Install Lazy Susans in deeper cabinets.
- Build or install the wall cabinets closer to the countertop.
- Make bigger, deeper toe kicks and knee spaces under counters.
- Install “D-shaped” loop handles on cabinet doors and drawers.

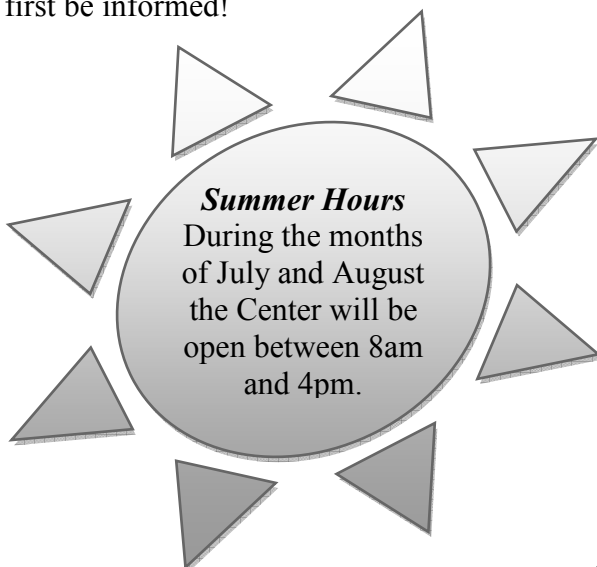
### *For Appliances*

- Place outlets no lower than 15" above the finish floor.
- Switches and thermostats should be no more than 48" above the finish floor.

Also keep in mind that all rooms need:

- Five square feet of open area to allow a wheelchair user to make a 360-degree turnaround. (Residential bathrooms usually do not meet this requirement.)
- Low-pile carpeting not exceeding ¼” or slip resistant flooring.
- Doorways that offer at least 32" of clear width between the jambs (34”-36" is better). Swing-away hinges on doors can be used to allow full use of the entire doorframe width, sometimes alleviating the need to widen a doorway.

These are but a few ideas regarding home accessibility and universal design concepts. To find out more you can “Google” the term “Universal Design” or contact the Center at 607-432-8000. Remember, the only chance we have to be prepared is to first be informed!



### **CCFI’s New Blog!**

*Charlie Reichardt — Systems Advocate*

As advocates, we are devoted to improving the quality of life for individuals with disabilities by taking action to achieve a barrier free, fully inclusive society. As you may know, one of the most significant vehicles used to accomplish this goal is the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network (SSAN).

We have developed a blog to promote discussion and inform everyone about the goals, actions and accomplishments of the SSAN. The blog provides an avenue for any interested citizens to become more involved by joining the network.

Although it is the NYAIL Disability Priority Agenda that serves to focus the overall direction of the blog, we encourage participants to post disability related information.

The blog is a work in progress, so feel free to make comments directly to me at CCFI or post them to the blog.