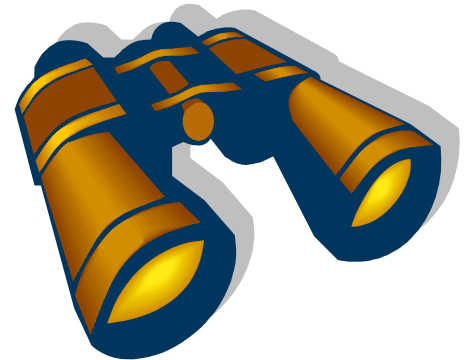


The LEGISLATIVE LOOKOUT

Catskill Center for Independence

Fall 2011
Volume 4, Issue 1

Published and distributed by the Catskill Center for Independence, "The LEGISLATIVE LOOKOUT" is a newsletter devoted to improving the quality of life for individuals with disabilities by taking action to achieve a barrier-free, fully inclusive society. As a component of the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network (SSAN), this newsletter is intended to keep you informed about the goals, actions and accomplishments of the SSAN. Aside from up to date information, this newsletter provides the avenue for interested citizens to get involved. For more information, you can email joshuaking@ccfi.us.



A fond farewell to an amazing advocate, colleague and friend

-by Chris Zachmeyer, Executive Director

Many of you have gotten to know Charlie Reichardt over the years. Charlie has been the Center's Systems Advocate since he first started working at the Center in April, 2000. Charlie has touched the lives of those he came in contact with in many positive ways. One of the issues Charlie was most passionate about was the right of people with disabilities to be able to cast their vote privately and independently like everyone else. The Center has been a voice for inclusive accessible voting since 1992. Ironically, Richard Zachmeyer, the Center's former Executive Director died on Election Day, November 2000, the very day that, for the first time, all of the polling places located in the Center's catchments area were physically accessible to voters with disabilities. Over the years Charlie continued to work hard to see people with disabilities fully included in the electoral process and in every other aspect of community living. He worked with the manufacturers, researchers and developers of several voting machine companies to help them move to a more accessible product. He was a change agent; he was a role model. He was also a husband, a colleague and a friend.

On April 2nd 2011, Charlie lost his latest battle with cancer. Thank you, Charlie, for your inspiration and your friendship. You will be sorely missed.



Charlie Reichardt, December 2006, courtesy of Don Wyckoff.

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CCFI welcomes new Disabilities Rights Advocate

The Catskill Center for Independence proudly announces the arrival of a new Disabilities Rights Advocate, Joshua King. His main role at CCFI will be to manage the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network (SSAN). He comes to us with many years of advocacy and human services experience, which has helped Josh to be able to become quickly acclimated to the disabilities arena. "I truly believe in the Independent Living Philosophy and simply put, I feel strongly that people with any type of disability deserve the same rights, choices, and opportunities as anyone else who is not disabled", says King. While working on his Bachelor of Science Degree at Cazenovia College, Josh was fortunate enough to complete a number of internships focusing on HIV/AIDS agendas and received the Human Services Program Award for his dedication to the field. His experience has allowed him to dive right into the fray and demonstrate his abilities as a powerful supporter of disability rights. To contact Joshua King, email him at joshuaking@ccfi.us or call him at 607.432.8000

12th anniversary of Olmstead decision incites campaign against Medicaid reform

—CCFI Executive Director and Co-Chair of NYAIL Chris Zachmeyer states,

"This new reform will have devastating effects and allow even more consumers to slip between the cracks, which is unfortunate."

June 22, 2011 marked the twelfth anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Olmstead*, which granted the integration mandate of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to include long-term care. On that day twelve years ago, the Supreme Court established that people with disabilities have a civil right to live within the community. As it stands today, members of Congress are attempting to undercut that right by cutting Medicaid or allowing states the "flexibility" to cut these programs as they see fit.

As a reaction to these anticipated federal plans, the Catskill Center for Independence will be joining the New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL), the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL), and centers for independent living from across the country in a mass mobilization of effort in order to reach out to Congressional representatives, with the main goal of eliminating the Medicaid institutional bias.

The ongoing campaign will culminate with a rally in Washington, DC on Capitol Hill, Wednesday September 21st. It is important for all people, especially people with disabilities to be able to exercise freedom of choice when it comes to how they receive care. The Medicaid budget cuts will make an even greater negative impact on populations like the disabled, rather than saving the state money.

To find out how you can become involved in the campaign against Medicaid Reform or to get involved with the SSAN, you can visit The Catskill Center for Independence website at www.ccfi.us, send an email to joshuaking@ccfi.us or call (607)432-8000.

Each of us working together CAN make a difference! Tell a friend: Join the SSAN today!



Addressing needs of people with disabilities?

Despite the opposition, President Barack Obama has been working toward not only recognizing the issues concerning individuals with disabilities and the elderly, but also working toward a resolution. One step was for the President to begin appointing several individuals with varying expertise in order to unite in the Disability Advisory Team that is intended to help determine the best way to go about addressing a tough system that has historically not worked in the favor of those in the greatest need of services. Through a series of interviews, public forums and virtual town halls, his Advisory “Dream” Team has been working diligently to compile the comments by those individuals close to and most impacted by disability rights concerns, including many persons with varying disabilities. On July 14th, Kareem Dale, Rebecca Cokley and Jeffrey Crowley answered questions live, during the first ever virtual town hall provided by the White House. If you would like Information on updates it can be requested by emailing disability@who.eop.gov or a video of the Virtual Town Hall can be found at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2011/07/14/open-questions-disability-policy>

There had been minimal commentary coming from the President’s advisors, however, most everyone would agree that they are now in fact listening and are posting blogs, videos and of course the most recent virtual town hall. Not only are they listening, but they are also restating the President’s position and really making an effort to employ advice and suggestions on policy that will put the consumers at the forefront. At this point it is difficult to predict what will come about, but it has been suggested that this is only the beginning of a meaningful and purposeful plan to enact legislation that actually works. “Any opportunity to ask questions and have some sort of dialogue in the disability community is a step in the right direction. The long term value remains to be seen, but we have to start somewhere”, says Helen Benlisa, Project HAVA Director for CCFI.

As expected these concerns have become a hot button issue, creating an even greater divide among political parties. President Obama had recently addressed the nation on July 11th regarding Medicaid, taking a powerful stance that a restructuring must occur, stating: “we have an obligation to make sure that we make those changes that are required to make it sustainable over the long term.” It will be an uphill battle, nonetheless.

Tell us what YOU think our representatives should be doing to address the needs of people with disabilities... send an email to joshuaking@ccfi.us and your comments could be included in a future issue!

New York works to tackle Medicaid concerns

According to the Medicaid Redesign Team (MRT) website, Medicaid, the leading New York health insurance program with over 4.7 million people in need, draws funds from a susceptible budget of a mere \$53 billion, making it near impossible to sustain indefinitely. Given those statistics, it is no wonder there is such a scramble to address the budding concerns of taxpayers, legislators and the like. In a proactive approach to anticipated changes in state Medicaid programming, the Medicaid Redesign Team has been chipping away at the issues. They have been doing so by creating work groups such as The Managed Long Term Care Implementation and Waiver Redesign workgroup in order to specifically address concerns that will offer Medicaid recipients a more streamlined, yet better accessible program. Melanie Shaw, Executive Director, New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) is part of a powerhouse team to include legislators, advocates and health care professionals from across the state that will hash out a more efficient Medicaid. In fact, they welcome the advice from all perspectives and New Yorker’s can provide their opinions by emailing comments to streamlining@health.state.ny.us. A major focus now is how to plan not only savings, but also creating long-term overall improvements. For complete information on the DOH, the Medicaid Redesign Team or any of the workgroups, you can visit their website at: http://nyhealth.gov/health_care/medicaid/redesign



NYAIL and CDR push for reduced spending in NY

Earlier this year, The New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) and the Center for Disability Rights (CDR) collaborated on an action plan intended to reduce New York State's Medicaid spending, while promoting the independence of individuals with disabilities. They provided an eight part proposal that would ideally save millions of dollars over the next five years, if adopted. NYAIL and CDR urged the state to provide consumer choice through a shift from traditional care models to a variety of community-based service and support options. Many supporters insist that the current system is far too costly and is essentially throwing away money. Independent Living Centers from across the state banded together to show support for the proposal, sending individual recommendations to the state as well. For more information visit the Center's web site at: www.ccfi.us, NYAIL's web site at www.ilny.org, or CDR's web site at www.cdrnys.org.

NYAIL's 2011 Disability Priority Agenda

HOUSING

CIVIL RIGHTS

MENTAL HEALTH

EDUCATION

TRANSPORTATION

For complete information on NYAIL and this proposal, contact Lindsay Miller, Advocacy Coordinator: email lmiller@ilny.org

Senator responds and takes a stance

A long awaited response from United States Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) about the state's financial situation was well received by CCFI and the SSAN. Reminiscent of a presidential speech, his email spoke of "commonsense" without "punishing middle class Americans" and, of course, people with disabilities. The economy is in shambles, therefore causing some very difficult decisions to be mused, especially with reference to NYSED's Special Education Mandate Relief proposal and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). He, like a number of the more forward thinking representatives, is ready to take on our status without placing people with disabilities in limbo.

Even though our state is struggling financially, there is no reason for us to take considerable steps in the wrong direction by reducing or eliminating certain aspects of any of our agenda to improve the independence and quality of life for those with disabilities. Our schools have seen sufficient losses in Special Education and Resource classrooms, pushing students with disabilities just a bit closer to the edge of failure and if this is not handled appropriately there will be further damage done to the foundation of success.

As talks continue to be put on hold, students with disabilities are forced to accept unsuitable placement within day programs and sheltered workshops, instead of would-be triumph within the larger community. Like Senator Schumer stated, "The time has come for all parties to come together for the good of the nation and make compromises to both cut our debt and deficit as well as protect our nation's long term economic growth."



Debt ceiling causing setbacks for social programs

When you consider the list of issues concerning the public, the matter taking center stage is the status of social programs such as Medicaid and Medicare, both of which have been under extreme scrutiny during the talks to lower the deficit. This has truly become one of the hottest and most pressing concerns for advocates and opponents alike, forcing issues like education, transportation and justice to patiently wait their turn for coverage. While both sides are raising convincing arguments as how to address astronomical expenditures, one thing is agreed upon: something must be done, and fast! This subject has been squeezed into the spotlight based on the government's aspiration to reduce spending and boost our economy on all levels. Discussions on appropriate lines of attack have emitted ideas of Medicare becoming privatized and the enactment of managed care and spend-downs for Medicaid, causing those in the greatest need of these programs to be unsure of their fates. It is hard to keep up.

Back in February, Governor Andrew Cuomo released the New York State Executive Budget and was quoted as saying, "New York is at a crossroads, and we must seize the opportunity, make hard choices and set our state on a new path toward prosperity", alluding to the overspending of previous administrations. While there is something to be said about the state's operating costs, the question to be asked is: why do we keep attacking the programs that we need the most? Surely there is some other way to spend less money without hurting what appear to be targeted groups, like those who are disabled. The one topic that seems to be avoided like the plague is raising taxes for the very few rich inhabitants that seemingly own just about everything and dictate everything and much more. Part of the original agenda was to swiftly take care of the state's failing education system, which has seen a number of cuts that will certainly wreak havoc on students, due mainly to the elimination of teachers and a number of much needed supports in our schools including Special Education.

Even though both parties finally reached an agreement that prevented a financial shutdown, clouds of confusion still remains, and many questions about how existing programs and services will be affected. Anyway you cut it, lawmakers are undoubtedly going to end up scrupulously cutting the budget by a widespread loss of programming, jobs, resources and supports. Unfortunately, we are in a lot of trouble due to the state's financial woes and it feels like there is no end in sight. It is a sad reality for any person with a heartbeat and even sadder still, for the mammoth number of people with disabilities that will be ill-fated by the passage of legislation that will be less than complimentary to ever changing needs. Now is an important time for people to get involved with addressing the system that can change outcomes for all citizens, not just the expected negative impact on people with disabilities.

Don't sit back and wait to see what happens, get involved now!

Join the SSAN by calling (607)432-8000, email joshuaking@ccfi.us, or visit the Catskill Center for Independence website at www.ccfi.us and be sure to tell a friend to join SSAN in order to make a difference!

The countdown has begun...
REGISTER TO VOTE NOW!



Contact joshuaking@ccfi.us
to find out how!

*"Our problems are manmade,
therefore they can be solved by man."*

-John Fitzgerald Kennedy



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Every Day is Independence Day!

Tell us what you think!

Tell us what you think...

What is the most important issue or need for people with disabilities?



“What about housing? There is still a critical need for safe, affordable and accessible housing. The waiting list is approximately a year or more, if you are lucky! With proper housing, people live longer and healthier lives, and more often than not will result in fewer doctor or hospital visits, too. This can translate to someone becoming a contributing member of their community again. By providing quality housing for people with all sorts of disabilities that is accessible in all ways, including cost, people generally rely less on other government social service programs, too...”

—John W., SSAN volunteer

Call, write or email joshuaking@ccfi.us and your comments could be used in future issues!

In the news...

- **The Workforce Investment Act (WIA)** comes under analysis yet again!
<http://www.disabilitycoop.com> and search “subminimum wage”
<http://nfbutah.org/2011-orlando-convention-nfb-agenda>
<http://tash.org/speak-out-against-subminimum-wages-for-workers-with-disabilities>
- **Center for the Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY)** releases staggering statistics.
<http://www.cidny.org>
- **Special Education** programs will see inevitable changes as a number of modifications are underway to help the state reduce the high cost of education.
<http://www.disabilitycoop.com> and search “NYSED” or “special education”
<http://www.nysed.gov> and search “special education mandate relief proposal”
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** could possibly be funded through an increase in cigarette taxes!
<http://www.disabilitycoop.com> and search “IDEA”
- **Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) Act** is another part of the Gang of 6’s plot to reduce deficits.
<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0711/59502.html>
- **White House** looks into disability concerns.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/disabilities>

Is there a story you think our readers would be interested in? Let us know! joshuaking@ccfi.us

