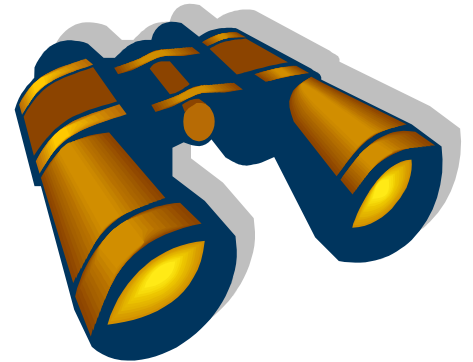


The LEGISLATIVE LOOKOUT

Catskill Center for Independence

Winter 2011-2012
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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.



Advocates travel to DC to say: "My Medicaid Matters!"

On September 21st, 2011, thousands of advocates converged on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. to rally against drastic reductions and emphasize the importance of Medicaid for those with low incomes, the elderly and of course those with disabilities. For several months now, supporters have been working together to get as many people as possible to D.C. for the "My Medicaid Matters" rally, directed towards our nation's leaders. Earlier press releases highlighted the event's main focus of how Medicaid provides vital home and community based services, support services for relatives or caretakers and significant jobs for direct care workers. The event commenced at 12pm and featured several advocates, legislators and allies who spoke passionately about the likely devastating effects of spending cuts toward the lifeline that helps keep tens of millions of Americans healthy. There is a fear that arbitrary cuts to Medicaid and other social programs will neutralize the decades of time spent on the disability rights movement. Catskill Center for Independence was just one of the many groups that were at the rally, sending Disability Rights Advocate, Joshua King as a representative. "It was absolutely awe-inspiring to see so many people banded together with a common interest. It is vital to save

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CCFI's Disability Rights Advocate Joshua King with a group of advocates and consumers from Cortland's ATI, on Capitol Hill.

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“YOUR STORIES” ...

Covering the issues that are most important to readers like you!

Each edition of the Legislative Lookout will provide a platform for you the reader to submit suggestions and ideas for stories you would like to talk about. Readers can view the chosen submission on the last page of the newsletter in the “Tell us what you think” section and are encouraged to submit comments by emailing joshuaking@ccfi.us.

“What about housing? There is still a critical need for safe, affordable and accessible housing...”

-John W., SSAN volunteer

Dear John W.;

I agree that housing is such a need throughout any given community, especially in relation to individuals with disabilities. Low cost accessible housing could provide a great relief to those people who are in the most need such as individuals whom may possibly be stuck within the confines of a nursing home and those simply wishing to be independent. Right now, there are some things being done to address the disparities in housing for individuals with disabilities. The Most Integrated Setting Coordination Council (MISCC) was developed in 2002 in an effort to ensure that individuals with disabilities are afforded the opportunity to live and function within their own communities, in the most integrated setting possible. The MISCC is comprised of key agencies throughout the state including the Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR), which work together in order to identify needs and develop action plans at the quarterly meetings held in Albany. The MISCC allows for your participation and encourages individuals with disabilities to attend the meetings. Frequently consumer feedback from the meetings is included in the Annual MISCC Report and Implementation Plan. You can learn more about the MISCC participant agencies and view reports or meeting minutes by going to the OPWDD website at <http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/MISCC>. Other housing concerns are also being addressed by the Medicaid Redesign Team’s (MRT) Affordable Housing Workgroup, in which the concerns of individuals with disabilities are being represented by our biggest advocacy ally, the New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL). This workgroup actively seeks out public input into their recommendations for the state in order to execute appropriate changes to the dismal housing availability for consumers in need of affordable and accessible housing options. For information, updates and suggestions you can visit the MRT website at http://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/redesign/affordable_housing_workgroup.htm. Lastly and most recently, the Obama Administration has announced a \$749 million hike in housing assistance for individuals with low income, the elderly and disabled. HUD’s sections 202 and 811 Supportive Housing grant funding will certainly address the issue of affordable and accessible housing options and supports for those in need and you can learn more about this at http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/press/press_releases_media_advisories/2011/HUDNo.11-266. I hope that you will find all of this information useful and I urge you to get involved in any way you can!

Thank You for Your Submission!

Sincerely,

Joshua King, Disability Rights Advocate

Let us know if you are interested in having your concerns covered in one of our newsletters!

Send an email to joshuaking@ccfi.us.



“My Medicaid Matters” (continued from page 1)

Medicaid from these thoughtless budget cuts that will prevent a lot of people from maintaining or achieving their independence”, he says.

Although the rally has come to an end, advocates continue to apply pressure to the Congressional Super Committee, sending countless emails and inundating our representatives’ offices with phone calls. Currently, NYAIL has taken seats on a couple of the Medicaid Redesign Team’s (MRT) subcommittees, in order to make sure that the disability community is properly represented during the ongoing changes to the program. The Medicaid program has been difficult to navigate for many people due to the variations of coverage and the forced streamlining; it is hard to keep up with the intricacies and nuances. To learn more about the changes to Medicaid and updates from the MRT, visit www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/redesign.



Long awaited announcement: NYAIL gets the contract!

“We are looking forward to working very closely with the SSAN at a time when your activity and power is needed most!”

*-Lindsay Miller,
Advocacy
Coordinator for
New York
Association on
Independent Living
(NYAIL).*

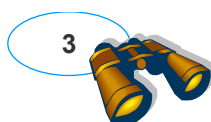
In late October, a much anticipated announcement came regarding the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network (SSAN) coordination site, which was awarded to New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL). For months, advocates across the state were continuing to operate, while questions loomed about who would get the contract from ACCES. This announcement brings about a sense of relief for some and SSAN advocates will finally be able to center their efforts in collaborating with NYAIL’s powerhouse team.

The SSAN is compiled of thousands of volunteers all over New York State that participate in action alerts regarding important pieces of legislation affecting individuals with disabilities. As the need for support arises, email alerts are generated from the coordination site, sent to ILCs including the Catskill Center for Independence and then on to the SSAN volunteer network who will then take action. The work of the SSAN has influenced the course of law in New York State and in the country. The success of the entire SSAN can be attributed to the hard work and dedication of each of the network volunteers, who spring to action when there is a need.

The contract begins January 1, 2012 and will run until the end of September of 2013. At this time, NYAIL is making preparations for the work plan, as excitement among partnering advocates builds. Be on the lookout for action alerts, coming soon!

To find out how you can become involved in the SSAN, you can visit The CCFI website at www.ccfi.us, send an email to joshuaking@ccfi.us or call (607)432-8000.

SSAN WANTS YOU! BECOME A NETWORK VOLUNTEER TODAY!



Advocates team up on disability issues

A very important aspect of the work that is done in the advocacy world is reliant upon the established relationships and collaborations with other agencies throughout the larger community. Coming together with a common interest and similar goals has helped establish some of the greatest moments in the history of disability rights. These linkages enable us to draw on the strengths of others and learn how we can employ alternative methods of thinking and doing. While we may not always agree on all of the issues and each come from especially unique backgrounds or perspectives, as a united front we can influence major changes to the systems that govern us. One thing that we can all agree on is that in order to advance the rights of individuals with disabilities, we must fuse our efforts and think outside the normal parameters of the box. With an abundance of legislative shortcomings and ever changing structures, it becomes yet more important to know who is also fighting the same battle. Certainly every individual counts, however there is always better strength in numbers. To join SSAN call (607)432-8000 or email joshuaking@ccfi.us



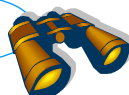
(From left) CCFI's Project HAVA Director Helen Benlisa, Ulster County BOE Commissioners Victor Work and Tom Turco, CCFI's Disability Rights Advocate Joshua King and (center) RCAL's Systems Advocate Keith Gurgui joined forces to stress the importance of accessibility in voting, by demonstrating the Ballot Marking Device (BMD) machines for the community in Kingston, NY on October 27th.



10 WAYS TO GET INVOLVED:

1. Volunteer.
2. Support a cause.
3. Plan an event.
4. Write a letter.
5. Send an email.
6. Make a phone call.
7. VOTE!
8. Donate to an agency.
9. Advocate.
10. **JOIN SSAN!**

To make a charitable donation to the Catskill Center for Independence you can contact us at (607)432-8000 or to learn more about getting involved in the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network (SSAN) email joshuaking@ccfi.us or call



Has HAVA really Helped America Vote?

Election Day was on November 8, 2011 and despite it not being a Presidential Election, Project HAVA Director Helen Benlisa has been hard at work to generate education and awareness about the Help America Vote Act of 2002. "It will be a long process for people to get familiar with the new voting systems. Everyone from the voter to the poll worker to the election administrator is on a learning curve", says Benlisa. HAVA joins other federal legislation that prohibits discrimination against any eligible voter in the United States, providing special provisions for individuals with disabilities. New York received federal money to replace old voting machines with new systems that use electronic technology called the Ballot Marking Device (BMD), which provides better access to voters with disabilities and voters with limited proficiency in the English language. Helen was then able to collaborate with a downstate agency (CIDNY) in order to develop the *Non-Technical Guide Describing Standards for Poll Site Accessibility*. Each state was required to replace their voting machines by 2006 and since then Helen and the team at Catskill Center for Independence have taken their efforts on the road and beyond.

CCFI's Architectural Barrier Consultant Don Wyckoff joined Helen and the pair traveled all over the state in the months prior to Election Day in order to provide poll site accessibility training to election officials and commissioners in almost every upstate county within the Project HAVA catchment area. The main goal was not only to teach them of the importance of HAVA, but also to demonstrate how to conduct a poll-site accessibility survey. Every participant received a certificate after their training and notification was sent to the State certifying that participants were able to assess poll-sites in their respective counties. While the law mandates that every poll site has at least one accessible voting machine for people with disabilities and that all poll locations are physically accessible, enforcing this law can be a challenge without the specific understanding of what is or is not accessible. Joshua King, the Center's Disability Rights Advocate also connected with voters and Legislators with the clear message: "the BMD machines are able to be used by all people- not only those with disabilities. This technology ensures that all people are able to exercise their Civil Right to cast a ballot independently and privately."

Project HAVA also channeled the focus of advocacy via email, telephone, the web and media outlets encouraging the support in using the BMD machines. The efforts of this trio have surely had an impact on the success of Project HAVA and have eliminated confusion, resistance and lack of enthusiasm regarding HAVA and the Ballot Marking Device. Surely it will take some time to work out proper implementation of this technology, but the only way to truly recognize the need for additional changes is for all people to actually use the machines and report their individual experiences to the appropriate channels such as their County Board of Elections or the Project HAVA hotline at 1-888-NYS-HAVA. Another option is to send an email to Project HAVA at nyshava@ccfi.us or helenbenlisa@ccfi.us. The driving force of all elections is voter participation on all levels.

"The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice and destroying terrible walls which imprison men because they are different from other men."

-Lyndon Baines Johnson

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With the local elections behind us:
The countdown has begun...
Presidential Primaries are April 24th, 2012!
REGISTER TO VOTE NOW!



Contact joshuaking@ccfi.us
to find out how!

The Dignity for all Students Act has been making news as of late, since being signed in as law back in 2010. It features specific language to characterize acts of bullying, placing special attention to the area of disability. The law is also able to provide direction in addressing and preventing bullying of all kinds. Several organizations have stepped forward to assist New York State with successful implementation of the law, including the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), which is now part of the New York State Education Department's (NYSED) task force. The task force works collectively to provide guidance to individual local school districts throughout the state, offering training, curriculum and materials for students and teachers. NYSED has been making preparations for the rollout of the law, which takes effect beginning July 1, 2012. According to the NYSED website the concept behind the Act is "to provide the State's public elementary and secondary school students with a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, intimidation, taunting, harassment, and bullying on school property, a school bus and/or at a school function." This law is quite powerful and recognizes the difficulties that are faced by students, especially those with a disability. A new video has been released in order to promote the efforts of the Dignity Act and can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njqs4YCbuVo>.

LAWS
you need to
KNOW

New York State Representatives want fair wages for disabled workers...

HR 3086: Fair Wages for Workers with Disabilities Act of 2011, is a new bill that pushes for the equality of workers with disabilities and is gaining much force, while creating quite the buzz within the advocacy arena. So far, New York State is leading the way with the highest number of co-sponsors, with 10 out 19 endorsements from our great state! Frank Pennisi of STIC and Chair of the NYAIL Employment Committee says, "It looks like this bill has some momentum, so let's keep pushing!" Employment has become such a major concern for individuals with disabilities and recent reports have indicated that the unemployment rate for this group is low and possibly decreasing. HR 3086 seeks to eliminate the outmoded special wage certificates established as part of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which essentially allowed for workers with disabilities to be paid substandard wages. Over the summer, advocates reached out to Representatives pleading for their endorsement to level the employment playing field as part of the Transitioning towards Excellence in Achievement and Mobility (TEAM) legislation. To learn more about the Fair Wages for Workers with Disabilities Act of 2011 go to <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h112-3086> or contact Disability Rights Advocate Joshua King at (607)432-8000 and join SSAN, which is supporting this legislation and needs your help!

Cuomo grants coverage for Autistic children

Children in NY will finally get mandated insurance coverage to include screening, diagnosis and even the treatment of autism and autism spectrum disorders. This news brings about a sigh of relief for families that have a child or children with autism, generally classified by a number of levels of difficulty with social interaction, communication and various behaviors. Representatives from across the state have been seeking to establish this law due to the efforts of advocates and the release of astounding statistics that 1 in 110 children have autism. Autism Speaks is one of many advocacy organizations that is thrilled with this news and has up to date information on this law and all things autism on their website <http://www.autismspeaks.org>. Governor Andrew Cuomo spoke poignantly while signing in the law, stating "The children will get the help, the families will get the support ...it will be a burden that insurance companies can handle." The law will go into effect sometime next year.



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Email:
ccfi@ccfi.us

or visit us on the web:

www.ccfi.us



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?



“Today intolerance pervades our society and those people who deviate from the norm tend to be discriminated against, even feared. Society’s awareness, or lack thereof, in how little we understand the daily struggles, discrimination, low expectations and barriers that are imposed daily on the disabled is disheartening. Why is it difficult for a society as a whole to face people who are different? The discrimination faced daily by people with disabilities is ever constant. People with disabilities do not want charity, they do not want to be patronized, and they do not want limits imposed upon them.”

-Cyndi P., SSAN Volunteer

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

In the news...

- **The Commission on Quality of Care (CQC) looking to revamp the system.**
<http://blog.timesunion.com/capitol/archives/85607/cqc-is-revamping>
- **New York Makes Work Pay offers new helpful tools for workers with disabilities.**
<http://www.nymakesworkpay.org>
- **Danny Hakim of New York Times tackles disability concerns.**
http://topics.nytimes.com/topics/reference/timestopics/people/h/danny_hakim/index.html?inline=nyt-per
- **Early Intervention services are lacking.**
<http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2011/11/09/most-lack-early-intervention/14412>
- **Government seeks to make health care more accessible.**
<http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2011/11/01/feds-health-care-accessible/14359>
- **Kaiser Family Foundation illustrates how states stack up with community living.**
<http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2011/10/27/amid-cutbacks-expand-community/14322>
<http://ehbs.kff.org>
- **Office of People with Developmental Disabilities releases 5.07 Statewide Comprehensive Plan.**
http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/2011_waiver/index.jsp

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

