

The RCAL Independent



"Your Independence is Our Mission"

Volume 2, 2017



LOAN CLOSET HOURS

Monday through Friday

10am – 3pm* If these hours are not convenient, please call 331-0541 x 27 and other arrangements can be made.

* Please note the loan closet is not an emergency service.

Spotlight on Business by Hillary Nichols

RCAL is excited to present a new feature to the *RCAL Independent*, our Spotlight on Business in which we will highlight a local business that is dedicated to providing goods and services to our community. We will closely examine how places in our community are reaching out to the disability community to break down barriers to be accessible to all.

Presenting *Essential Fitness*, a full service personal training studio located on Main Street in Port Ewen. Austin Benjamin, owner and lead trainer at *Essential Fitness*, is native to Ulster County and has over 20 years' experience as a personal trainer in a variety of capacities. Austin prides himself on his belief that everyone, no matter what their physical make-up, can benefit from a fitness routine. The training studio's philosophy is that you are never alone. As a client you are always with a trainer either 1:1 or in a group class. Austin draws on his own observations and experiences and states "That I learned over the years that those who work with a trainer succeed and often surpass those who don't." Everyone at *Essential Fitness* works with their trainer to develop their own individualized program that best suits each person's fitness needs and goals.

I asked him to speak specifically to what his fitness studio can offer someone with a disability and what they can expect as a client. *Essential Fitness* is a two story studio with the ground floor being wheelchair accessible. Austin boasts many of his success stories and has worked with clients on the Autism spectrum, individuals with Cerebral Palsy, MS, significant spinal cord injuries, and people in all phases of physical rehabilitation. The studio also has the only ZAAZ machine in Ulster County. ZAAZ, a low impact vibration machine, designed with NASA technology has benefits for anyone looking to improve their overall health, Diabetes relief, circulation, and coordination just to name a few. Austin utilizes ZAAZ specifically for people with different types of physical disabilities; citing ZAAZ is able to "wake up" muscles groups that may be difficult to access with traditional fitness equipment.

The biggest take away from the studio is a belief in every person who walks into *Essential Fitness*. The compassion, encouragement, and non-judgmental attitude build not only a person's strength but also their confidence which stays with them long after the training session has ended.

To learn more about *Essential Fitness* you can stop in at 186 Broadway in Port Ewen, or call (845) 332-4212. To learn more about *Essential Fitness* you can visit their website at LoveEssentialFitness.com.



The New York State Budget and Disability Policy by Alex Thompson

On April 9th, New York state legislators and the Governor finally agreed to a budget nine days after the annual budget deadline. It was highly unusual that a budget was not passed on time, but not unusual that our concerns on transportation, housing, and Independent Living funding were not addressed in the final budget. In New York, the budget is created from a State Senate Budget, Assembly Budget, and the Governor's Budget which all must be reconciled to form a single budget that everyone can agree to vote on.

We did have our policy priorities included in both the Senate and Assembly budget proposals thanks to our local legislators who have met with us and are supportive of people with disabilities. The Governor's budget proposal did not include our policy priorities, and that led to a rally outside his office where advocates from *RCAL* joined a diverse group of Independent Living Centers from across the state and other groups like ADAPT to demand that the Governor include people with disabilities in the budget. Ultimately, the Governor was not responsive to disability issues being included in his budget.

Governor Cuomo has said that the final hurdle to the full budget passing was a "federal funding response plan" that he sought in order to have flexibility in the event of cuts from federal spending. The Governor did secure the ability to make changes to the budget mid fiscal year. However, the legislature will have 90 days to pass an adjusted budget first, only giving the Governor the ability to change the budget if the legislature is unable to pass an adjusted budget in that time period. Hopefully, this tool for the state to maintain a balanced budget isn't needed. Our advocacy at the federal level are now more important than ever before because of how they can immediately impact state spending.

What's in the Budget? The abbreviated disability edition.

Uber and other rideshare companies will be operating statewide as of this summer. We did get a disability task force to evaluate the need for wheelchair accessible service, but there are no requirements that they provide wheelchair accessible service as a condition to operate. This outcome was disappointing considering the support we were getting from key figures like Assemblyman Kevin Cahill.

Independent Living is being funded at current levels. Despite strong support from the Assembly and Senate, as well as assurances that the \$1 million increase was safe, the \$1 million increase was not included in the final budget. Independent Living funding has remained at the same level for many years and it impacts the ability of Centers to reach people, deliver services, and survive sudden economic impacts to a Center's budget.

Visitability Tax Credits were not included in final budget. Once again, despite advocacy efforts and strong support in both houses, this modest pilot project did not make it into the final budget. The Governor had vetoed the program from becoming law in the past and asked that it be done through the budget process, and now it still hasn't gone anywhere despite Senate and Assembly support.

The Assembly and Senate had wanted to increase the Supplemental Security Income rate but the proposal was not included in the final budget. The Social Security Administration pays a base rate of SSI benefits, but states can supplement that amount. For an individual living alone in 2017, New York State provides an additional \$87 supplement.



On Wednesday, March 22, 2017, *RCAL* held a press conference which focused on preserving funding for community based services for all people with disabilities. Speaking at the press conference were (pictured above and at right) Alex Thompson, Systems Advocate at *RCAL*; Susan Hoger, CEO; Keith Gurgui, Member of the Board of Directors; and Darcie Kortan, parent of a child with disabilities.

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Fifty-five million dollars has been allocated to raise the hourly salaries of direct care workers. The Budget includes an agreement that will provide a 6.5 percent raise over the next two years, 2.5 percent each year. The increases will help non-profits funded by the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, the Office of Mental Health and the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services.

The Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Association of New York State was able to get language in the final budget that requires the state health commissioner to authorize fiscal intermediaries before they can work with patients.

Legislators agreed to a first-in-the-nation plan to waive the cost of two- and four-year public colleges and universities for families earning less than \$125,000 per year. Provided in the plan is the ability of students to pause or restart their scholarships because of “hardship” and make up credits if they fall behind one semester, according to the governor’s office. The budget tries to offset the cost of textbooks by providing an \$8 million investment in resources like electronic books, and hopefully they will all be entirely accessible for students with disabilities that must usually request electronic copies of textbooks from publishers in what can be a very long process.

A plan designed to limit increases in Medicaid prescription drug pricing requires drug manufacturers to provide rebates. If drug prices charged to the Medicaid program exceed a certain cap, the state could require the manufacturer to supply a rebate. The program is designed to reduce Medicaid spending while not reducing access to prescription drugs.

The Budget includes workers' compensation reforms that provide new protections for injured workers. The new reforms ensure that the most significantly injured workers have the right to be considered for life-time benefits. The reforms will also ensure swift access to hearings for injured workers not receiving benefits, create a clear formulary for prescription drugs, and provide relief for first responders exposed to a traumatic event at work.

The state budget provides \$500 million for the Health Care Facility Transformation Program. Hospitals and health systems use money to help with mergers and retire debt. It helps small, struggling hospitals be acquired and helps large health systems become even larger. Some of the money is already earmarked for certain hospitals.

How to Diversify Your Workforce

RCAL cordially invites you to join us for a *free and informative*:

Make-Your-Own Breakfast Burrito

Learn *new and innovative* ways to save money, improve retention, and diversify your workforce.

Join us on Wednesday, June 14th @ 7:30am-9am

727 Ulster Ave Kingston, NY

Seating is limited! Call or email today to secure your reservations.

(845) 331-0541

hnichols@rcal.org

CALLING ALL BUSINESSES!!

RCAL is hosting a free workshop to all area business. Don't miss this opportunity to come learn about ways to hire skilled workers and diversify your workforce. We will introduce ways to save your business money.

Call today (845-331-0541 ext. 35) to register and reserve your spot space is limited!

PART-TIME FLEXIBLE EMPLOYMENT



RCAL
727 Ulster Avenue
Kingston, NY 12401

Available Opportunities:

Part-Time Respite Provider

RESPITE IS A SERVICE THAT PROVIDES RELIEF TO INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE PRIMARY CARE AND SUPPORT OF AN INDIVIDUAL WITH A DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY.

&

Part-Time Community Habilitation Support Staff

COMMUNITY HABILITATION IS A SERVICE WHICH PROVIDES EXPERIENCE AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT TO INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES WHO LIVE AT HOME, IN ORDER THAT THEY MAY LIVE MORE INDEPENDENTLY.

&

Part-Time Employment Specialist

BE A PART OF A TEAM TO WORK COLLECTIVELY TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO ACQUIRE THE SKILLS NEEDED TO WORK INDEPENDENTLY.

For more information contact **RCAL** at:

(845) 331-0541 or office@rcal.org



RCAL operates in accordance with the conviction that people with disabilities can and should make their own choices and decisions, and take control of all aspects of daily living, including education, employment, housing, health care, recreation, etc.

2017 Benefits Changes



By this time, everyone receiving Social Security benefits has noticed a small increase in their monthly check. The Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) for 2017 was .03% (resulting in a \$2 or \$3 increase in your SSDI payment (depending on your level of benefit). An individual living alone and receiving SSI saw an increase of \$2 per month. The federal SSI rate is now \$735. If you live in NYS, you may also receive a state supplement of \$87.



Because the COLA was so small this year, most people already receiving Medicare Part B will not see an increase in their monthly premium. If you are new to Medicare this year, your monthly premium will be \$134 per month. Medicare Part B covers your doctors, durable medical equipment, and outpatient therapies. Medicare Part B has a \$183 deductible per year and a 20% co-pay on covered services.

For people with lower incomes, there are several Medicare Savings Programs that can help pay your Part B premiums and co-pays. Income levels in 2016 were:

- ◆ **Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) Program:** If an individual's income is below \$1,010 per month and their resource level is below \$7,280, this program helps pay for Part B premiums, deductible, coinsurance, and co-pays. For a couple, the combined income would be less than \$1,355 per month and the resource level would be less than \$10,930.
- ◆ **Specified Low-Income Medicare Beneficiary (SLMB) Program:** If an individual's income is below \$1,208 per month and their resource level is below \$7,280, this program will help pay for the Part B premium only. For a couple, the combined income would be less than \$1,622 per month and the resource level would be less than \$10,930.
- ◆ **Qualifying Individual (QI) Program:** You must apply every year for QI benefits. QI applications are granted on a first-come, first-served basis, with priority given to people who received QI benefits the previous year. (If you qualify for Medicaid, you are not eligible to receive QI benefits.) If an individual has income of less than \$1,357 per month and resources of less than \$7,280, this program can pay the Part B premium. For a couple, the combined income would be less than \$1,823 per month and the resource level would be less than \$10,930.
- ◆ **Qualified Disabled and Working Individuals (QDWI):** This program helps pay the Part A premium if; you are a working disabled person under 65; you lost your premium-free Part A when you went back to work; you aren't getting medical assistance from your state and you meet the income and resource limits required by your state. If an individual's income is below \$4,045 per month and their resources are below \$4,000. For a couple their income is less than \$5,425 per month and their resources are below \$6,000.

Medicare Part D premiums can increase on a yearly basis whether there is a COLA increase or not. Everyone with a Part D prescription plan should read over the material sent to them each year and check to make sure their plan still suits their needs. If not, there is an annual enrollment (October to January) period when you can change your Part D plan to better suit your needs.

Each Part D plan will send out a formulary every year to let you know what drugs they will cover. If your drugs are not on the formulary, you will either need to talk with your doctor about using a different drug or find a plan that will cover your current medications. There are several ways to receive help to pay your Medicare Part D premiums.

- ◆ If you have Medicaid and your monthly income is less than \$1,010 for a single or \$1,355 for a couple, you will receive full extra help. You will have \$0 premium (for a benchmark plan) and \$0 deductible. The co-pay for generic drugs will be \$1.20 and for brand names it will be \$3.70.
- ◆ If you have Medicaid and/or the Medicare Savings Plan and your monthly income is above \$1,010 for a single or above \$1,355 for a couple, you will receive full extra help. You will have a \$0 premium and a \$0 deductible. The co-pay for generic drugs will be \$3.30 and for brand names it will be \$8.25

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- ◆ If you only have Medicare and your monthly income is below \$1,356 or \$1,822 for a couple and your resources are below \$8,890 for a single and \$14,090 for a couple, you will receive full extra help. You will have a \$0 premium and a \$0 deductible. You will pay \$3.30 for generic drugs and \$8.25 for brand name drugs.
- ◆ If you have Medicare and your monthly income is below \$1505 or \$2022 for a couple, you may be eligible for partial extra help.
- ◆ If you are working and receiving SSDI benefits, the earned income limit has increased to \$1,170. The trial work period limit has increased to \$840 per month.

For more information on any of the aforementioned changes or to further discuss how returning back to work might impact your benefits, contact Debbie Denise, Benefits Advisor at **RCAL**, at: (845) 331-0541 ext. 24 or ddenise@rcal.org.



On Tuesday, March 7th over 20 individuals from **RCAL** joined others from across the State to urge Cuomo to address the needs of persons with disabilities.



Check out **RCAL's new website at:**
www.rcal.org

SAVE THE DATE

Thursday, September 28th, 6-8 p.m. at *RCAL*

SPECIAL EDUCATION RIGHTS WORKSHOP -

DESIGNED FOR PARENTS, EDUCATORS, AND HUMAN SERVICE PROFESSIONALS. FOR INFORMATION OR TO REGISTER FOR THE WORKSHOP CALL DOROTHY RICHARDS AT (845) 331-0541 EXT. 18.

Medicaid Service Coordinator Greene County



RCAL

727 Ulster Avenue
Kingston, NY 12401
(845) 331-0541

RCAL (Resource Center for Accessible Living, Inc.) is a non-profit, community based service and advocacy organization run by and for people with any type of disability. Since 1983, *RCAL* has been dedicated to assisting and empowering individuals, of all ages, to live independently and participate in all aspects of community life. *RCAL*, as an Independent Living Center, has a long tradition of consumer controlled and directed service delivery.

RCAL is seeking a Medicaid Service Coordinator for the Greene County area. A Bachelor's Degree is required or one year (or more) experience working with people with developmental disabilities or one year experience as a service coordinator/case manager with any population. The ideal candidate will possess an understanding of Person Centered Planning, HCBS Waiver and related serves; as well have outstanding organizational, writing and interpersonal skills. MSC experience is strongly preferred.

Email résumé and letter of interest to office@rcal.org

or

Fax to (845) 331-2076

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This spring two new bird families took up residence on the RCAL property!

H V F A HUDSON VALLEY FOOT ASSOCIATES

Excellence is measured in FEET!

Dr. Andrew Hune • Dr. Douglas Tumen • Dr. Daniel Longo
Dr. Michael Keller • Dr. David Kim • Dr. Niral Patel
A Partnership of Board Certified Podiatric Physicians

KINGSTON (845) 339-4191	ALBANY (518) 458-1771	WEST COXSACKIE (518) 731-5444	NEW WINDSOR (845) 561-1255
WAPPINGERS FALLS (845) 297-4055	RED HOOK 1-(877) 339-HVFA	HUDSON 1-(877) 339-HVFA	MARGARETVILLE 1-(877) 339-HVFA



RCAL Raises the Roof!!! - RCAL is proud to announce that through the funding of a grant awarded by the Nonprofit Infrastructure Capital Investment Program (NICIP) the agency was able to replace the entire roof, roof insulation, and gutters. RCAL was one of 237 nonprofits statewide to be awarded grant money out of 635 applicants. Staff feedback about the new roof ranges from being very thankful about not having to worry about a leaky roof after a big storm to being extremely pleased with how quickly the construction project went with minimal disruption to the agency. **RCAL's new roof is pictured on the left and on the right.**



Amazon Smile
You shop,
Amazon Gives!

How does it work?

- ◆ Go to www.smile.amazon.com
- ◆ Enter your Amazon username & password
- ◆ Choose RCAL as your charity
- ◆ Shop Amazon Smile to donate 0.5% of your eligible purchase to RCAL

For questions call (845) 331-0541. Happy Shopping!

Recent Supreme Court Decision

by Gloria Toporowski

In a recent Supreme Court ruling regarding *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, the high court recognized the importance of “appropriate” in Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) which is the cornerstone of the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA).

The court’s decision emphasized the importance of providing students with IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) more than just a minimal benefit from their education. Therefore, if a student continues to make only minimal progress yearly on their IEP goals, is that student really benefitting from a FAPE or merely just attending class every day?

By their recent decision in the cited case, the Justices voiced a resounding “No” by a vote of 8-0 when they wrote “minimal progress” is not what FAPE is intended to provide.

In his ruling Chief Justice John Roberts wrote, “When all is said and done, a student offered an educational program providing ‘merely more than de minimis’ progress from year to year can hardly be said to have been offered an education at all. The IDEA demands more.” The court further stated that IEPs “must be appropriately ambitious in light of (a child’s) circumstances, just as advancement from grade to grade is appropriately ambitious for most children in the regular classroom. The goals may differ, but every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives.”

In the above cited case, the parents of an autistic boy felt their son wasn’t receiving an appropriate education in his public school setting as their son was not making progress on his IEP goals. This lack of progress led them to place their son in a private school setting and in turn they sued their public school district for tuition reimbursement when their son began to flourish in his new private educational setting.

The case moved thru the Colorado Courts which ruled in favor of the school district citing the boy had received “some” educational benefit and therefore no reimbursement was justified. The parent’s disagreed under what is expected of a FAPE.

And that is what the Supreme Court focused on by rejecting the lower court’s ruling acknowledging that minimal or some progress was not what is expected of non-disabled students and therefore should not be expected of disabled students. By the court’s unanimous decision, the Justices sent the message that public school districts should set the expectations of IEP students higher than merely just making minimal progress. To not do so under the new ruling could be viewed as a violation of FAPE.

To read the full article regarding the Supreme Court’s decision, click on the following link <https://www.disabilitycoop.com/2017/03/22/high-court-backs-robust-fape/23489/> .



Pictured at Left: RCAL staff participate in the Gardiner 5K Cupcake Classic on Saturday, May 20th in Gardiner, NY.

Where Health & Housing Intersect



NYConnects and our Supportive Housing Program help seniors, the disabled and working families throughout the Hudson Valley



www.rupco.org



RCAL staff gather to celebrate retirement of colleague:

Margaret Curschmann (pictured above: middle row, third from left), a Medicaid Service Coordinator, retired from **RCAL** in late 2016. Margaret's plans for retirement include spending more time with her animals and her grandchildren. Although Margaret is missed by the **RCAL** family and the families that she served, we wish her great happiness in the next phase of her life.

- Lesley Kelder

Wage Reporting for SSA Disability Beneficiaries

If you receive SSI or SSDI and you have returned to work, you are required to report your wages on a monthly basis. If you do not report your wages and Social Security (SSA) decides you are no longer eligible for a benefit check, you could be responsible to pay back any money SSA says you owe them from the time you became ineligible for a benefit check.

Wage Reporting Basics

When you start a new job, you must inform SSA; they will not automatically know that you have returned to work. The best method way to inform SSA is to send a letter to your local SSA field office. Keep a copy of the letter with the date mailed for your records. The letter should contain the following:

- Your name and social security number
- The name of your employer
- The number of hours you work each week
- Your hourly rate, and
- Your start date

When you experience increases or decreases in hours or pay, report the change to your local SSA field office ASAP in writing. Keep a copy of the letter with the date sent for your records.

When and How

You should report wages to the local SSA field office each month. For most SSA disability beneficiaries, the preferred method of reporting is by mail. Be sure to report all monthly wages each month. If you have more than one job, make sure you include paycheck stubs from all jobs.

- Keep a copy of all paystubs that you submit to SSA.
- File your original check stubs for your records. Write your social security number on the paycheck stubs you submit to SSA.
- If you report your wages in person, ask for a receipt and keep the receipt for your records.
- If you report your wages by mail, include a letter that asks SSA to send you a receipt and keep it for your records.

For more information or to get help deciding what wage reporting method you should use, contact Debbie Denise, Benefits Advisor at **RCAL**, at: (845) 331-0541 ext. 24 or ddenise@rcal.org.

LUNCH BREAK

Find a job and keep it!

Bring your
lunch to...

Kingston
Library

12-1pm

Every
Friday



Join us at the Kingston Library, 55 Franklin Street, for a collaborative open space to improve your job experience.

Facilitated by the employment department at RCAL.

For more information:

Call: (845) 331-0541 x 35

Email: hnichols@rcal.org

RCAL is excited to announce that we are hosting a job club entitled "Lunch Break" starting on June 9th at 12:00 noon at the Kingston Library at 55 Franklin Street in Kingston. "Lunch Break" is an open collaborative planning space for people to come together to share the ups and downs of getting and keeping jobs in a structured setting. For more information please call Hillary Nichols (845) 331-0541 ext. 35 or email: hnichols@rcal.org



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Website: www.rcal.org

MEMBER OF
UNITED WAY OF ULSTER COUNTY

RCAL'S MISSION: THROUGH
ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION,
WE CREATE ACCESSIBILITY
AND PROMOTE INDEPENDENT
LIVING FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH
DISABILITIES AND THE
COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE.



RCAL—Officers
Susan J. Hoger, LMSW, Chief Executive Officer
Anthony Mignone, Chief Operating Officer
Sherry Crescini, Chief Financial Officer
For a complete staff directory go to:
www.rcal.org

RCAL—Board of Directors

Darlene Donotrio, Chair
Paul Scarpati, Secretary
Brad Bernard, Treasurer
Susan J. Hoger, Chief Executive Officer
Paula Kindos-Carberry
R. Marie Altenau
Joan Gundersen
Claudette Ford
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