LOAN CLOSET HOURS
Monday through Friday
9 a.m. – 3 p.m.* 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.

Jonas Retiring After 8 Years of Service by Jaime Bunt
Jaime Bunt and her Seeing Eye Dog, Jonas have been working together for 8 years. The team has been providing Disability Awareness Presentations at local schools, youth programs, and other agencies through RCAL for the past 5 years. On May 24, Jaime and Jonas had their last presentation at Robert Graves Elementary School in Port Ewen with Ms. Lenard’s students. Jonas will be retiring this summer and is looking forward to becoming Jaime’s pet, playing and relaxing without the stress of life as a working Seeing Eye Dog. Jaime will continue providing the invaluable experiences with her presentations after she is matched with her second Seeing Eye Dog this summer. Jaime and Jonas would like to thank all the schools, youth programs and agencies which welcomed them year after year to share their lives and in spreading disability awareness.

Pictured on this page: Jaime Bunt, Jonas, and students of Ms. Lenard’s class of Robert Graves Elementary School. Photograph complements of Ms. Lenard.
This is our last printed issue!
Our Newsletter Is Going Completely Digital
Staying connected to you is very important to us. To save trees and to put more money toward programs, The RCAL Independent will be available in electronic format only. The digital version will be in a similar format—and if you want a hard copy of an article, simply print the pages you want! Help us go green! To stay in the loop, please make sure you are on our email list. You call us with your email address at 845-331-0541 ext. 20 or email office@rcal.org. Thank you!

RCAL is a not-for-profit agency in Ulster County that has been helping people with disabilities since 1983. Your donations help us continue to provide services in your community.

Support RCAL by donating $35—for its 35th Anniversary!
Please complete this form and return it with your $35 donation to:

RCAL
727 Ulster Avenue
Kingston, NY 12401

Name: ____________________________________________________
Phone number: _____________________________________________
Address: ___________________________________________________
City/ State/ Zip: _____________________________________________
E-mail address: _____________________________________________

Please make checks payable to: RCAL
or
Donate online: http://www.rcal.org/donate/
Open Doors/MFP Transition Specialist
By Nicholas Hall

My name is Nicholas Hall and I am a Transition Specialist for the Open Doors and Money Follows the Person (MFP) Program grant administered by the New York Association on Independent Living. As a Transition Specialist I work with individuals living in facilities that wish to move back into the community. RCAL (The Resource Center for Accessible Living) is contracted to provide transition planning for all the facilities located in Ulster County. We also assist residents living in facilities outside Ulster County transition back to Ulster County.

The Open Doors/MFP program is funded by grants through the Department of Health. Every county in NYS has a Transition Specialist assigned to it. The program is designed to assist individuals who have Medicaid, have been in a nursing home at least 90 days, and who have expressed a desire to return to the community. The goal of the program is to increase the quality of life for individuals with disabilities, and assist with the barriers of transitioning and living safely in the community. The program does quality of life surveys prior to discharge and 11 months after living in the community to provide data to support meeting those goals.

As a Transition Specialist, I meet with individuals and their support team (such as family, friends, discharge planners, and service providers) to identify what services and programs they will need in the community. I then assist them in accessing those services and programs. Once an individual's needs, wants, barriers, and desired services are identified, we will work together to form a transition plan, prepare for living in the community, and, if necessary, assist with securing more appropriate housing. One of the main benefits to an individual utilizing this voluntary program in the transition process is having a professional who is familiar with the process and has the knowledge of the resources available in the local community.

The second part of the Open Doors/MFP program are the Peer Mentors. The Peer Mentors are a group of individuals that have lived in a nursing home and have successfully transitioned and are living in the community. Because of the similarities in disabilities, experiences, and struggles with the individuals in the transition process, the Peer Mentors provide a “reality” based support that can help individuals, their family, and friends overcome fears of barriers both real and perceived. The Peer Mentors meet with individuals either in a facility or in the community. The Peer Mentors are very effective with individuals who are struggling with the idea of living on their own after being in a facility for a long time. Peer Mentors are also able to share real stories with individuals that prior to their placement in a nursing home never had to think about navigating the community with a disability. Finally, Peer Mentors are able to give some empathetic emotional support while an individual is asked to patiently wait to transition to the community.

If you are reading this article, you may know someone who needs these services. Help us spread the word. Many of the individuals that could benefit from the program haven’t heard about the Open Doors/MFP program. If you know anyone in a nursing home that would like to live in the community, a family struggling to get their loved one home, or someone who is about to lose their apartment because they have been in a nursing home too long, give us a call, we are here to assist. I can be contacted at nhall@rcal.org or 845-331-0541 ext. 32.
RCAL
(Resource Center for Accessible Living)

First Annual Founder's Celebration

Come join us in a celebration of RCAL’s 35th Anniversary and to honor our founder, Joan Gundersen.

Thursday, October 25th
6:00 P.M.

Ole Savannah
100 Rondout Landing
Kingston, NY
$75 per person

For more information, to RSVP, or to sponsor the event:
Contact: Carol Ray-Hudson
(845) 331-0541 ext. 20
FIRST ANNUAL FOUNDER’S CELEBRATION

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2018 | 6:00 PM
TO BE HELD AT OLE SAVANNAH, KINGSTON

In celebration of RCAL’s 35th Anniversary and to honor our founder, Joan Gunderson

OLE SAVANNAH

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

FOUNDER | $1000
- 4 tickets to Founder’s Celebration
- Full page ad in event program
- Prominent location of name on event placard
- Prominent recognition on website
- Recognition via Facebook and Twitter
- Thank you in RCAL newsletter

ADVOCATE | $500
- 2 tickets to Founder’s Celebration
- Half page ad in event program
- Prominent location of name on event placard
- Recognition via Facebook and Twitter
- Thank you in RCAL newsletter

FRIEND | $250
- Quarter page ad in event program
- Name on event placard
- Recognition via Facebook and Twitter
- Thank you in RCAL newsletter

Silent Auction Donations

RCAL’s First Annual Founder’s Celebration is a wonderful marketing opportunity for your business. All guests at the event will be exposed to your product or service. Be creative! Donations of all kinds are welcome. Your business will be recognized at the celebration and in the RCAL newsletter, and you will receive a formal thank you letter for your contribution. To make an auction donation please contact Carol Ray-Hudson at cray@rcal.org or 845.331.0541 x 30.

Your independence is our mission!

Tickets to the Founder’s Celebration are valued at $75 each. Remaining cost of sponsorship is tax-deductible.

TO BECOME A SPONSOR PLEASE CONTACT US AT: cry@rcal.org

727 Ulster Avenue, Kingston, NY 12401 | 845.331.0541 | tty 845.331.4527 | rcal.org
Message From Special Education Advocate: Gloria Toporowski:

On March 13th of this year I was invited by Kingston’s own La Voz to address my role as a special education advocate to the Spanish community.

La Voz can be found on your AM frequency at station 1490. Host Antonio Flores welcomed me to the station’s studio, which was broadcasting live from two places simultaneously for the first time, from Kingston and Miami.

My invite to La Voz was to inform our Spanish speaking community that RCAL has multiple services available that may be of benefit to them, particularly in the area of special education, loan closet equipment, and Medicaid service coordination. The process as to how RCAL services can be accessed was detailed from a simple phone call, to a wheelchair request, to assistance with navigating the special education arena. When Flores asked how the community could best access RCAL’s service, the answer was easy, “In most cases it all starts with a phone call.”


JOIN OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS!

RCAL is recruiting interested individuals with diverse backgrounds in finance, fund development, nonprofit management and/or program development to serve on its Board of Directors.

For more information, please contact:

Anthony Mignone, Interim CEO
(845) 331-0541

Pictured right: RCAL staff member, Isaak LeBlanc instructs visitors about Black and White Ruffed Lemurs at the Trevor Zoo in Millbrook, NY. LeBlanc volunteers at Trevor Zoo in his spare time. In May a number of fellow RCAL staff members visited the zoo to see Isaak at work.

Gloria Toporowski pictured with Niko and Rusty.

Gloria Toporowski pictured with Niko and Rusty.
## Getting to Know the ABLE Act

The ABLE Act allows certain people with disabilities and their families to save funds in a tax advantaged savings and investment account. Similar to a 529 College Savings Account, anyone can contribute to an ABLE account belonging to a qualified person with a disability, including friends, family, and the individuals themselves.

For the first time in the history of public policy, the ABLE Act recognizes the extra and significant costs of living with a disability and provides a savings tool to address them. Congress signed the ABLE Act into law on December 19, 2014, after nearly a decade of national, state, and local advocacy efforts.

### What is an ABLE account?

ABLE accounts are tax-advantaged investment accounts that help qualified individuals with disabilities and their families to save for disability-related expenses. The funds in the account grow free, and owners do not have to factor distributions made for qualified disability-related expenses when determining eligibility for federally funded means-tested benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid.

### Why is there a need for ABLE accounts?

Millions of individuals with disabilities and their families depend on a wide variety of public benefits for income, healthcare, and food and housing assistance. To qualify for many of these benefits (SSI, SNAP, Medicaid), a person must have limited financial resources. For example, eligible people must not have more than $2,000 in cash, savings, retirement, or other items of significant value when they apply for SSI benefits. ABLE accounts allow certain people with disabilities to save funds well over these limits without losing eligibility for benefits.

### Who is eligible to open an ABLE account?

The ABLE Act limits eligibility to people who realized a disabling condition prior to turning 26. If a person meets this requirement and already receives SSI or SSDI benefits, they are automatically eligible for an ABLE account. If a person is not an SSI or SSDI recipient, but meets the age of disability onset requirement, they may still be eligible to open an ABLE account. To do so, a person must meet Social Security’s definition and criteria for significant functional limitations and receive a letter of certification from a licensed physician.

### What can ABLE account funds be used for?

Account owners may only use ABLE account funds to purchase “qualified disability-related expenses.” A "qualified disability expense" is any expense related to the designated beneficiary’s blindness or disability that helps them to increase or maintain their health, independence and/or quality of life. Examples of eligible expenses include: education, housing, transportation, employment training and support, assistive technology, personal support services, healthcare expenses, financial management and administrative services, and other expenses.

For more information on ABLE accounts, contact Debbie Denise, Benefits Advisor at RCAL at 845-331-0541 ext. 24.
Advocates from RCAL have been making several trips to Albany this year. First was to the New York Association on Independent Living’s Budget Advocacy Day. Our center met with representatives in the State Senate and Assembly to prevent harmful budget policies like requiring higher scores to qualify for in-home assistance.

In April, we had a larger group come to Albany. Our day started with a presentation and several speakers, including the Assembly Task Force on Disability’s Chairperson Assemblyman Skoufis. We met with the offices of Assemblyman Cahill, Senator Amedore, and Senator Bonacic. At each office we advocated for several bills including ending discrimination based on source of income, creating incentives for home accessibility, establishing a tax credit for small businesses that hire people with disabilities, consolidation of election dates, requiring taxi services to offer accessible transportation, implement fare caps for para-transit services, and creating an Office of Community Living, an office which would be dedicated to advocating for the needs of people with disabilities in state government.

In June, the state assembly held their annual Legislative Disability Awareness Day. The morning program included several speakers from the State Assembly talking about the importance of the work done to advance the circumstances of people with disabilities. We attended a special program on disaster planning for people with disabilities and are continuing to work on providing more information to the local community about how to be prepared, especially following the recent Tornado touchdowns. As part of the day the Assembly passed three of our bills. Those bills are the small business tax credit for hiring people with disabilities, home accessibility tax credit (Visitability), and a bill that permits legal action against state government entities that violates disability rights laws (Sovereign Immunity).

Our office also had Congressman Faso tour the building and learn more about the services we provide. We discussed the importance of our employment services, education advocacy, representative payee services, benefits counseling, Medicaid service coordination, Open Doors program, Nursing Home Transition and Diversion, comhab/respite and our loan closet. We discussed issues particularly important to the local disability community including threats to Medicaid services, federal funding for the Open Doors program, raising the age to qualify for ABLE Accounts, and access to accessible transportation services.

We are continuing to work on breaking down the many barriers people with disabilities face in the community.
Congressman John Faso Visits RCAL
by Alex Thompson

RCAL hosted and provided an office tour to Congressman John Faso, on Friday, May 25th after many months of coordination and planning. Our advocates met with the Congressman’s Kingston office several times last year to talk about disability issues in our community. These talks included discussion on threats to Medicaid and other healthcare concerns that would dramatically impact people we serve in a negative way. We invited the Congressman to visit and learn more about our center and the people we serve. Our mission is to always educate the community, including our elected representatives, on disability awareness.

During the tour Congressman Faso was able to talk with representatives of several different parts of the RCAL team. Debbie Denise, our Benefits Counselor, and the Congressman were able to talk about the ABLE Act Savings Accounts with a pending bill to expand eligibility. The proposed bill would expand the age at which someone qualifies and the savings accounts allow people to save and invest without losing certain benefits. Their office does refer individuals that come to them and Debbie helps them out.

Our Medicaid Service Coordinators were the notable ‘candy stop’ along the tour with their usual assortment of treats. The MSCs spoke about their role in working with individuals, the service areas they work in, and the big problem of transportation for people with disabilities in our area. Congressman Faso was able to ask questions and learn more about the Medicaid Service Coordination services that could soon change under a New York state mandate.

The Congressman was able to speak with Nicholas Hall about the Open Doors program. Nicholas talked about his work helping individuals before and after transitioning to living in the community, and the differences he could see in their quality of life. Open Doors is known in federal law as “Money Follows the Person” or MFP. MFP is already set to lose federal funding even though it saves the federal and state governments millions of dollars by tying healthcare spending to individuals and helping them transition to living in the community. The EMPOWER Care Act is a proposed bill in Congress to continue this extraordinarily successful demonstration program. While New York State can continue to fund the program there are no guarantees.

We saved the RCAL Loan Closet for last. What was once a garage is becoming much more. Our Interim Executive Director Anthony Mignone led this last part of the tour and filled in any details the Congressman was interested in learning more about on their way to the RCAL Loan Closet. The Congressman was treated to being one of the first few to view the freshly painted mural by Charla Malamud.

The Congressman represents the 19th Congressional district which covers some of our service area. We hope he can take away from this experience a better understanding of the service needs for individuals who we work for and care about. Our center does not endorse any candidates and welcomes all community members to stop in and learn more about our services.

PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE AT RCAL

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.

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.

For more information contact Brenda DeBaun, bdebaun@rcal.org or (845) 331-0541 ext. 30.
RCAL Welcomes New Staff:
* Bridget Haug joined RCAL in April 2018 as a Medicaid Service Coordinator. Bridget has had extensive experience in the human service field, both domestically and abroad. She possesses a Masters in Public Health and is currently working toward becoming a Registered Nurse. Prior to working at RCAL, Bridget served as a Service Planning Coordinator at the Mental Health Association in Ulster County. Bridget enjoys a good hike, a nice breeze, and spending time with her cat and dog.

* Jenifer Davis was recently hired as a Medicaid Service Coordinator at RCAL. She graduated in May 2017 from Mount Saint Mary College with her Bachelor's in Human Services. Prior to coming to RCAL, Jenifer was working as a Day Hab Instructor at Anderson Center for Autism. When she is not working, she enjoys spending time with her family and friends.

Loan Closet Items Go To Help People in the Dominican Republic by Gilles Malkine
RCAL is happy to announce that in collaboration with Ms. Cindy Kouhout, Executive Director of the Children’s Home of Kingston, a number of durable medical equipment items have been donated to individuals in the Dominican Republic. Ms. Kouhout has been working with a pastor in the DR who assists those who have been injured and/or who have disabilities, to deliver these surplus items that have been collected through donations to the RCAL loan closet.

Founded in 1876, The Children’s Home of Kingston (CHK) is a highly personalized, multi-service agency serving the needs of youth ages 8-21, who are experiencing difficulty at home, in school, or in their community. It plays a vital, positive role in the lives of those young people who need guidance to help themselves and to take part in community life. Services include clinical services, educational services, health services, independent living skills, behavior management, and recreational services.

Although this mission work is not directly related to The Children’s Home of Kingston, Ms. Kouhout and her husband, Kolin have a personal mission to serve in underprivileged communities such as the DR. The Kouhouts will be hand delivering these items to the community of Constanza, DR this summer.

Come check out the new mural in RCAL’s loan closet. The mural was designed and painted by former staff member Charla Malamed. Charla recently left RCAL to pursue a different career path, but generously donated her time and talent to complete this beautiful mural. Thank you Charla!
Caregiver Support Group

Starting July 12!

Caregiving for a loved one with Alzheimer’s disease? You don’t have to face it alone. Join us and receive the support you need to care for someone with dementia.

5:30-7 p.m. the second Thursday of every month

Resource Center for Accessible Living
727 Ulster Ave., Kingston

Preregistration is requested but not required; call 800.272.3900.

This program is supported in part by a grant from the New York State Department of Health.
Resource Center for Accessible Living, Inc.
727 Ulster Avenue
Kingston, NY 12401

Phone: 845-331-0541
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E-mail: office@rcal.org
Website: www.rcal.org

Through advocacy and education, we create accessibility, advocate and educate, and promote independent living for individuals with disabilities and the community as a whole.

RCAL’s Mission: Through advocacy and education, we create accessibility, advocate and educate, and promote independent living for individuals with disabilities and the community as a whole.

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