Finding & Keeping Employment When You have a Disability

RCAL’S EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AT WORK

THE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM at RCAL is growing. Led by Hillary Nichols, RCAL’s current team includes Gemma Calinda, Christine Castellana, Nesa Harris, Jennifer Mehlich, Kim Parrett, Catherine Spada and Ellen Wren. Together, they offer an array of services designed to help individuals develop tools for successful employment.

RCAL’s employment programs serve youth and adults of all ages, from every educational background, from a wide range of economic circumstances and abilities. The mission is the same for each person who walks through the door—discover a way to remove whatever barriers stand in the way of an individual reaching their career goal.

Through OPWDD, the (Office for People With Developmental Disabilities), and ACCES VR (Adult Career & Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation), RCAL offers the following programs: Supported Employment, Youth Employment Services, Job Placement, Pathway to Employment, the Employment Training Program, Community Pre-Vocational Services, and a Community Orientation to the ACCES VR program. The list of programs does not adequately...
describe the range of individualized supports offered—but what can be simply stated is that RCAL’s focus is on the ability and the possibility rather than the disability.

**PRE-VOC**

From pre-vocational training for individuals just entering the work force to supporting the employment goals of highly educated and specialized workers, RCAL’s team is dedicated to their mission.

Employment Specialist Gemma Calinda teaches RCAL’s work-readiness classes to pre-vocational trainees. The work-readiness classes concentrate on the “soft skills” of employment. These include things like understanding the hidden rules of the workplace, motivation, expectations, attitude, appropriate attire, and getting to work on time. They might define the tasks to prepare at night and the morning routine to help them prepare for their work day.

Through class discussions the students focus on identifying their individual and unique interests, strengths, preferences, challenges, daily and long-term goals. Understanding one’s own likes and dislikes makes it that much easier to find rewarding employment, and the best chance to feel self-confidence.

The classes cover the many types of communication that occur at every worksite, including decision-making, problem-solving, active listening, face to face, telephone etiquette, communicating with your co-workers and your supervisor. Communication skills are important; the participants practice, through role-play, the different skills needed to get an efficient outcome.

An important component to the process is that the sessions promote group discussions and team work. As Employment Specialist Gemma Calinda says, “We all learn from each other’s journeys, we congratulate each other, offer advice, make suggestions... together we make learning an incredible experience!”

Not every story is an immediate success, some journey’s are more arduous than others, but every story speaks of resilience and tenacity on the part of both the RCAL employment specialist and the individual with whom they work.

*Pre-voc classes get a “mittens-up” sign and a big smile from Kayla, who is expressing her interest in writing a book*
SUPPORTING EMPLOYMENT

Jennifer Mehlich has been an Employment Specialist at RCAL for a number of years and has many stories. She speaks of Ted, a young man who uses a wheelchair to get around and assistive technology to communicate. Ted held various positions at a large retail chain for many years and was an exemplary employee. During his time of employment, the device he needs to communicate stopped working, which prevented Ted from performing his duties on the job. As a result, he was removed from the payroll. It was simply a clerical error, but for Ted it meant unemployment. Jennifer contacted the management at the store, they put their heads together and figured out what had happened. The new manager did not hesitate to reach out to the upper management, state and regional, until Ted’s employment was reinstated.

RCAL’s employment specialists do far more than help write the important resumes that identify the experience and strengths of each person. They are fierce advocates, coaches, cheerleaders and even assistive technology experts when they need to be.

Maria is in the process of entering the workforce. Maria is 28 years old and has Autism Spectrum Disorder. She currently volunteers in a museum specialty shop. As part of Maria’s program, an RCAL employment specialist accompanies her during her volunteer hours. Learning the appropriate behavior for this job setting, practicing interpersonal skills, when to pause and listen, when to offer suggestions, controlling the volume of her own voice are all part of Maria’s career development process. She is looking forward to becoming a paid intern through an OPWDD program. Maria is on her way to vocational independence.

Paul was born with Cerebral Palsy. A recent graduate from SUNY New Paltz, Paul worked part time at a local coffee chain. He was not meeting his career goals which caused him to be frustrated. He also needed help determining how much money he could earn and still hold on to the benefits he received as a result of his disability. He found his way to RCAL through ACCES-VR where he received support in creating a resume and determining his financial and vocational rights and responsibilities. Paul is now working as a residential counselor with at-risk youth, a position that utilizes his education much more appropriately and offers opportunities for career growth.

Finding and keeping meaningful employment is a challenge for most of us. Approaching this process with a disability can be especially daunting for some. Employers who have had no experience with a worker with a disability can be hesitant. But, according to the program’s supervisor, Hillary, most employers who have employees that have come to them from an RCAL employment program end up telling her they have never had a better employee.

Some of the details, names, and circumstances of the individuals’ whose stories are told here have been changed to protect their privacy.
Are you worried about your child’s progress at school?

What are your parental rights with regards to your child’s education?

What are your school district’s responsibilities and mandates?

What if you disagree with district’s recommendation for your child?

Do you know how to access and utilize NYSED regulations?

YOU ARE WARMLY INVITED TO A SPECIAL EDUCATION RIGHTS WORKSHOP AT RCAL

JANUARY 8 | FEBRUARY 4 | MARCH 11

Workshops are held in the conference room at RCAL from 10am - noon

Workshops are designed for parents, educators, and human service professionals. Pre-registration is required. There is a $5 workshop materials fee.

If you would like to request a workshop to be scheduled and held at a location more convenient to specific groups of participants, please let us know.

Contact Gloria Toporowski at 845-331-0541 x14 or gtoporowski@rcal.org to find out more about our Special Education Information and Advocacy and to register

A child’s greatest advocate is his/her parent. You are their first teacher and know your child best. When it comes to advocating in the school environment under the umbrella of special education, there are somethings every parent should know. Helping parents and professionals understand their student’s rights is the goal of this workshop. RCAL strongly encourages all parents to take the workshop whether for the first time or as a review. The workshop is required for all new parents seeking special education advocacy with RCAL.
MICHAEL THOMASON arrived at RCAL this past April through an Internship program with the NYS Education Department. His assignment—to work with Alex Thompson, RCAL’s Systems Advocate. Alex is RCAL’s representative in the New York System Advocacy Network (SSAN) working to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities. SSAN employs a variety of strategies and methods designed to achieve a barrier free, fully inclusive society for everyone, especially individuals with disabilities.

One notable experience occurred very early in Michael’s internship on a trip to Albany for the New York Association on Independent Living’s (NYAIL) Legislative Day on May 1st. Presentations from activists were engaging, emotional and eye-opening. Michael was moved by the stories and the experience of being a witness to the power and passion of activism by and for people with disabilities.

The eldest in a family of five, a Rosendale native, raised primarily by his grandparents, Michael born with cerebral palsy. Michael’s first several years of life were punctuated with numerous painful physical treatments and surgeries. He spent most of his first year of second grade in a children’s hospital. He tells the story of a bunch of terribly sick kids kind of thrown together with a mixture of not only maladies, but also a vast range of support systems. Some with loving families, some wards of the state with nowhere else to go. There were kind caregivers and cruel ones, ones who should not have been in the business of caring for children at all. The hospital staff did their best to create educational and recreational experiences for the children, but were unsuccessful much of the time.

Warm memories stand out like the time his grandfather came to visit and brought Happy Meals for every single one of the children. He speaks of the two main doctors who led his treatment, patiently, carefully explaining as they went along, and giving him opportunities as much as possible to understand and guide his own care.

After the hospital Michael came back to Rosendale and basically had to start over again, repeating second grade and being sent to school outside of his own district for reasons that to this day he considers unreasonable and unnecessary. Adult fear and apathy took precedence over the best interests of Michael, the child and student.

A surgery in third grade to remove a pin which had been inserted in 2nd grade was followed by hours and hours of physical therapy. And then by another surgery in 8th grade.

In high school, Michael rejoined his peers at Kingston High and had a fairly routine life where he did all the things every teenager does, for better or worse. He joined the school choir, developing a rich mentor relationship with his choir director, hung out with friends, stayed out of trouble most of the time. He fell in love, experienced the deep friendships particular to that defining time of life, and joined the millennial masses applying to colleges.

Michael was born the year the ADA was enacted. Thirty years later, he is a father of two, he is a college graduate with a degree in Political Science. He spent the past couple of years as the primary child caregiver for his children.

Michael has a goal to obtain his MA in Rehabilitation Counselling. He has personally experienced being discriminated against vocationally because of his disability. A supervisor he interviewed with at a local, publicly-funded organization came right out and told him she would never hire someone in a wheelchair.

Currently he is completing an internship with Debbie Denise, RCAL’s benefits advisor, and just yesterday Michael accepted a part time position at RCAL manning the front desk.
I learned a lot from my conversations with Michael. I learned that it’s not uncommon for folks with disabilities to decide not to marry their partner, because of the risk of losing the benefits they need to live independently. I learned that people with disabilities have the highest percentage of unemployment, I learned that depression is a very common side effect of disability and that thoughts of suicide are not unusual. I am in awe of Michael’s resilience. I am grateful to him for his frank openness in sharing part of his life story with me, and I am looking forward to having him as a co-worker and going to hear him sing with the Mendelson Club of Kingston Choir at their holiday concert in December!

In the heart of the sometimes sleepy town of Rosendale, the Rosendale Theatre has been standing it’s ground for over a hundred years and counting. Owned since 1949 by a local family, the building and the business became an endangered species. The old one-screen building could not compete with the multiplexes that took over most of the movie theater business. When members of the Rosendale Community heard the original owners needed to sell and were looking for a buyer, the Rosendale Theatre Collective was formed and quickly turned into a not-for-profit organization.

Sub-committees were formed, funds were raised and the building became the property of the Rosendale Theatre Collective. One of the main priorities of the collective was to make the theatre fully accessible. Today, ten years later, the Rosendale Theatre has accessible seating areas, ADA-compliant entrance ramps, one fully accessible bathroom, and a lift to take up the six steps from the lobby into the theatre. Today the theatre is a thriving anchor business with a rich combination of art films, mainstream films, live theatre, live music, classic silent films, dance films, National Theatre offerings and other special programming. The theatre’s commitment to accessibility includes welcoming, with wide open arms, volunteers from some RCAL programs. It’s a win-win proposition. Individuals working on independent living life skills get a real work experience and a free movie and the theatre gets a great volunteer.

www.rosendaletheatre.org
A victory in the fight to #SaveCDPA, Consumer Directed Personal Assistance

A JUDGE HAS RULED against the New York State Department of Health in CDPAANYS v. Zucker on the new reimbursement for the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance (CDPA) program. The decision invalidated the rate which would have devastated fiscal intermediaries and caused chaos in the CDPA program. Next year’s Medicaid program budget is already projected to be billions of dollars short due to shifting costs from this year into next year and other factors. We are expecting a difficult fight in Albany for 2020 to safeguard CDPA and other vital Medicaid programs for people with disabilities.

Ulster County Disaster Response and Recovery Committee launches Access and Functional Needs subcommittee led by RCAL

ULSTER COUNTY HAS A VOAD or Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster, known as the Disaster Response and Recovery Committee. RCAL has been involved for several years to provide input on disaster issues that impact people with disabilities. The subcommittee, previously known as the Vulnerable Populations subcommittee, is tasked with addressing access issues during and after a natural disaster. We hope to get more involvement from Ulster County as we try to plan ahead for all of the necessary accommodations to make a disaster response accessible and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

People with disabilities should have the option to stay in a shelter with accessible facilities, just like anyone else. We are looking forward to working with the American Red Cross as they prepare test runs on shelter setup. Several disaster scenarios across the country have resulted in people with disabilities unnecessarily admitted to hospitals or dying after being unable to evacuate.

**RCAL welcomes new Systems Advocate Keith Gurgui and offers warmest thanks and best wishes to Alex Thompson**

AFTER THREE YEARS AS Systems Advocate at RCAL, Alex Thompson is moving on to the New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) in Albany to work in communications for the organization. RCAL is a member of NYAIL. Keith Gurgui will be returning as the Systems Advocate to continue the good work RCAL does in advocacy. Keith brings years of experience in disability advocacy and grassroots organizing. Look for future updates from Keith.
BETSY ALBANY has lived in the area her whole life except for a few years she spent in Arizona. As a horse-crazy girl she was more than happy to spend most of her younger years working at a stable in return for riding lessons. She graduated from Cobleskill university with a degree in animal husbandry. She worked as a trainer and showed Arabian horses. Betsy studied accounting and business at UCCC and worked for many years at a non profit home care agency. She likes to sew clothes and has a goal to begin sewing adaptive clothing for people with special needs. In addition to her vocation and avocation, Betsy is the treasurer for local Sea scouts ship 609. This is a coed affiliate of the boy scouts of America that operates out of the Kingston maritime museum. She feels very comfortable working at RCAL, it suits her qualifications and personality perfectly. Betsy joins RCAL as our new bookkeeper.

Originally from San Diego, California, LAURA BURGHER began her higher education when she became a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) during High School. After graduation, she spent a year exploring Pharmaceutical Sciences at Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences but ultimately decided that was not the right fit for her. She returned to Ulster County, earned an Associates in Human Services from SUNY Ulster and then a BA in Psychology from SUNY New Paltz. Laura lives in Liberty, NY with her boyfriend Garett and their two dogs, Sophie and Baby. She loves spending time with close friends and family and has a passion for cooking, animals and the outdoors. Laura is an NHTD Service Coordinator/Health Homes Care Manager here at RCAL.

GEMMA CALINDA has spent most of her life in Woodstock NY. She has also lived in Queens, Ridgewood, NJ, Washington DC. She has a BA in Legal Communications from Howard University, the real H.U., (an inside saying amongst HBCU’s) and a Masters of Science Management specializing in healthcare from Kaplan University. She enjoys listening to music, great restaurants, (she loves filet mignon and can’t turn down great Italian or Mexican). She has had the same two best friends (twins) since fourth grade and cherishes spending time with them and their children. Her nemesis is her love of TV! (But it makes her laugh and keeps the drama on the TV screen and out of her life.) Above all, Gemma truly loves helping others! Having always been that way, she says, sometimes the need to lean on someone for help increases her desire to help others because she knows what it’s like. When Gemma came across the listing for the Employment Specialist job at RCAL she was not familiar with the organization, which she discovered was only a few miles down the road. After researching RCAL, applying and being offered a position, she happily accepted! She finds the work she does with her individuals rewarding and loves seeing their progress! She experiences it a pleasure and an honor every day she works at RCAL! Gemma works as one of RCAL’s employment specialists.

CATHERINE SPADA, found her way to RCAL initially during the 12 years she cared for her father, receiving much appreciated support through the NHTD program. When her father passed, she applied to work at RCAL, she liked how RCAL helps people in need from kingston. A Kingston native, Catherine attended Siena college where she received her undergraduate degree in Sociology, and then went on to SUNY New Paltz graduate Psychology program. Catherine loves to read, (mystery books are a favorite), dance, socialize, cook, travel, and she loves live music. Her father’s parents were Italian immigrants, her mother’s mother was from Czechoslovakia. One of seven, Catherine’s father worked for NYS Department of Labor. Her three siblings, two sisters and a brother, live in Texas, Puerto Rico and California, respectively. Not always a Kingston resident, Catherine has lived in Florida and on both coasts. Her favorite food is Alaskan king crab legs and anything chocolate. Her favorite book is The Prophet by Kahil Gibran. Catherine works as one of RCAL’s employment specialists.
RCAL Support Groups can help you:

- Understand changes in your life
- Maintain a positive attitude
- Identify and use resources for your well-being
- Learn ways of dealing with feelings / emotions
- Develop coping skills and adaptive behaviors
- Enhance your self-esteem
- Help yourself & help others
- Learn specific skills
- Discuss societal issues

**Support Group Schedule**

**AMPUTEE SUPPORT**
Last Monday of the month, 6pm

**TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY**
November 13 & 25 and December 9 & 23, 3pm

**AUTISM SOCIAL SKILLS**
Saturdays, 10:30-11:30 am

**ALZHEIMER’S CAREGIVERS**
2nd Thursday of the month, 5:30-7pm

VISIT RCAL.ORG FOR NEXT YEAR’S DATES.

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**Community Habilitation and Respite Providers Needed**

**QUALIFICATIONS**

Clean Driver’s License | A Good Heart | Compassion

RESPITE is a service that provides relief to family members who are responsible for the primary care and support of an individual with a developmental disability. 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.

-A VALID NYS DRIVER’S LICENSE IS REQUIRED-

Contact Supervisor Brenda DeBaun, Bdebaun@rcal.org or send fax to 845.331.2076
What is a Pooled Trust?

A Pooled Trust is a special type of trust that allows individuals to become financially eligible for Medicaid while preserving their income in trust. While not necessary for everyone, the end result of joining a Pooled Trust is that trust beneficiaries can receive Medicaid and continue to meet their financial needs.

Why join a Pooled Trust?

Under current Medicaid law in New York, any monthly income in excess of the Medicaid monthly income allowance has to be spent down on medical or home care services before Medicaid will provide coverage. Unfortunately, excess income each month cannot be spent on living expenses such as food, rent, clothing, and utility services. As a result, Medicaid recipients will not have sufficient income to pay their normal monthly living expenses. Medicaid recipients in New York who deposit their income in a Pooled Income Trust will not be subject to the rules that normally apply to excess income. In other words, Trust income will not be counted as available income to be spent down each month. This income protection is available by joining a Pooled Income Trust.

Who can benefit from a Pooled Trust? Examples include:

- Elderly persons residing at home who would like to protect their income while accessing Medicaid home care.
- Recipients of government benefit programs, such as Medicaid, who reside in the community.
- Persons residing in Assisted Living Communities under the New York Medicaid Program who would like to protect their income while accessing Medicaid.

What items can the Pooled Trust funds be used for?

- Living expenses, including clothing, food and shelter for non-SSI beneficiaries
- Homeowner expenses including real estate taxes, utilities and insurance
- Rental expenses
- Supplemental home care services
- Geriatric care services
- Entertainment and travel expenses
- Medical procedures not provided through government assistance
- Attorney and guardian fees
- Any other expense not provided by government assistance programs

For more information contact RCAL's Benefits Advisor, Debbie Denise at 845-331 x 24.
Did you know...

RCAL’s Representative Payee program has its own phone number. The number is 845-331-7039.

**REP PAYEE HOURS:**

- **Weekly Check Distribution:** Tuesday, 1:00-3:45pm
- **Telephone Hours:** Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 12 - 2pm
- **Walk-In Hours:** Tuesday, Thursday, 2:30 - 3:45pm

Visit our website at [rcal.org/services/representative-payee/](http://rcal.org/services/representative-payee/) for more information or to download the materials for an application.
RCAL Welcomes Four New Board Members

Sheila Kilpatrick has been a resolute advocate for housing rights for 17+ years. She is passionate about decent affordable housing being available to all. She brings expertise in program management, human resources, and fiscal oversight, and excellent interpersonal skills to her new role at RCAL. She is currently Vice President of Operations at RUPCO, a strong partner organization to RCAL, serving many of the same individuals, with the same commitment to accessibility and inclusion for all residents of Ulster County.

Kathy McMahon has a strong and extensive background in advocacy. She has 15 years of experience as President and CEO of Hospice & Palliative Care Association of NY, as well as years of consulting with Leading Age New York and her service as Executive Director of Michigan Health Association. She has a strong interest and background in non-profit governance both as a professional and volunteer.

Brooke Nelson’s foundation as a Special Education Learning Specialist has informed her work in the classroom, the courtroom, and even in a farm work program where she has been a coach, a mentor and an advocate for disadvantaged children and adults. She currently works with individuals to help them achieve their goals and visions through organization, staging and design techniques.

Melissa Rappleyea has worked for twelve plus years as a Medicaid Service Coordinator. A loyal and respected employee, Melissa understands RCALs strengths and challenges as few others do. Now a Care Manager working for Tri-County Care, she offers her experience at RCAL along with new skills in a new organization and an understanding of a changing field to the Board.

JOIN OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

For more information, please contact:
ANTHONY MIGNONE, CEO
845.331.0541 | amignone@rcal.org

RCAL is recruiting interested individuals with backgrounds in finance, fund development, nonprofit management and/or program development to serve on its Board of Directors. HELP US MAKE A DIFFERENCE!
Congratulations Christopher Boisseau

November 20th, RCAL hosted a book reading of “Misty,” by Christopher Boisseau, a friend of RCAL’s through our Employment Services. The author says, “My inspiration for this book is all the fireworks I saw each and every year, like the 4th of July at Kingston Waterfront and Cantine Field, carnivals, fairs, festivals, New Year’s Eve, summer events like Volunteer Day in Woodstock, Children’s Day Parade in Kingston, Celebration of Lights in Poughkeepsie, Brooklyn Promenade and lots more.”

Best of luck to Christopher in his writing career!
THE SUPREME COURT denied a petition from pizza giant Domino’s in October to hear whether its website is required to be accessible to the disabled, leaving in place a lower court decision against the company.

The case was brought by a blind man named Guillermo Robles, who sued the Domino’s after he was unable to order food on website or mobile app despite using screen-reading software.

The decision not to grant the case is a loss for the company and a win for disability advocates, who have argued that, if businesses do not have to maintain accessible sites, disabled people could be effectively shut out of substantial portions of the economy.

Attorneys for Robles argued in court papers that the Americans with Disabilities Act requires businesses with physical locations to make their websites and other online platforms accessible to those with disabilities.

A panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals sided with Robles, writing that the “inaccessibility of Domino’s website and app impedes access to the goods and services of its physical pizza franchises—which are places of public accommodation.”

Domino’s urged the Supreme Court to review the decision. By declining to do so, the court’s decision will leave the ruling in place.

Domino’s Pizza v Guillermo Robles, No. 18-1539.