This year is panning out quite a bit differently than I thought it would last time I wrote for the RCAL Independent. It has me questioning the best way to continue making sure political priorities of the disability community do not get drowned out in the hail storm of the many critical issues arising from the current pandemic. But I do know that in order to ensure that the voices of the vulnerable get heard, I can first start with my own.

I am one of the many thousands of New Yorkers that rely on essential services funded and administered by the state, without which I would not be able to live at home, maintain my current employment, or have attended and graduated college. Many others, such as our youth, receive special education services through the State Department of Education. Spouses with disabilities may benefit from state laws such as spousal refusal in order to become eligible for Medicaid without impoverishing their loved one. And many others, including seniors and individuals with disabilities like myself, receive home and community-based services such as personal care

(continued on page 2)
and physical and/or occupational therapy at home. The list goes on.

What is of great concern to me now is what the government intends to do as a result of the economic impact caused by the COVID-19 crisis. The state legislature has granted Governor Cuomo unprecedented and extraordinary authority in this year’s budget, passed last month, to unilaterally adjust the state budget in accordance with projections in state revenue losses that could be as much as 20%. With individuals out of work and businesses closed, state sales tax revenue has plummeted.

In conjunction with a bleak outlook for state funded programs, hospital networks that help support individuals with disabilities with many badly needed but “non-essential” diagnostic and surgical procedures, are in a bind. Receiving wound care or a kidney ultrasound to diagnose an abnormality may not be as critical to someone who is able-bodied, but for those who are not it can mean the difference between normalcy and months in bed or even hospitalization or death.

While the governor and his administration deserve credit for addressing the crisis for what it is by demanding federal assistance, implementing social distancing, prioritizing supply deliveries, and informing the public in daily briefings, they have undoubtedly saved lives and avoided an even greater tragedy from unfolding. That being said, let’s not forget that immediately before this pandemic, advocates were in Albany pushing back against cuts to personal care services, proposals to eliminate spousal refusal, and a look-back period for financial assets in determining an individual’s eligibility for community Medicaid (previously only used for nursing home Medicaid). All but the elimination of spousal refusal have been pushed through. Even without an adjusted budget we face a 1.5% Medicaid spending reduction across the board. A financial look-back for community Medicaid is now set for 30 months (2½ years).

Receiving wound care or a kidney ultrasound to diagnose an abnormality may not be as critical to someone who is able-bodied, but for those who are not it can mean the difference between normalcy and months in bed or even hospitalization or death.
years), effective October 1. This makes it all the more important for individuals who may require community-based services to proactively shelter their assets in a Medicaid Asset Protection Trust. Even these changes are only a handful that the state and its residents will be facing.

There are and will continue to be many issues that arise that deserve our attention. I am imploring all those who find time in their day to think about these issues and take a moment to call, email, or write your elected officials to demand that they protect our community’s social safety net programs. There is not enough space in any one newsletter to list all of the potential crises we are facing and how to fix them. But I plan to follow up on this article with changes to our website with the help of my colleagues to provide regular updates on particular issues that are most pressing and worthy of your attention.

Now, more than ever, our ability to gather and protest is compromised. We will have to find new ways to get the attention of media outlets, stakeholders, and elected officials to ensure that our priorities are not drowned out. Stay safe and optimistic but please take this as a call to action and a warning. Those who go unheard may find themselves wishing they had acted earlier.

On a personal note, I have been extremely fortunate to have the support of two loving and knowledgeable parents (both of whom are Registered Nurses), my sister who is visiting from Queens, and a group of dedicated personal care attendants that know my routine like clockwork. For so many others, the beginning half of 2020 has been a terrifying wake-up call and an overwhelming obstacle course of managing their own needs and/or that of their family. These are our neighbors, friends, and loved ones. Please help us give a voice to the voiceless and pay it forward. We are all temporarily-abled; advocacy now helps everyone eventually, regardless of their current circumstances. Stay safe, and as always, I’m available for questions. Just email me at kgurgui@rcal.org.

In solidarity, Keith Gurgui 🌟

Visit covid19.ulstercountyny.gov for Ulster County’s most up-to-date information and resources on the Coronavirus.
Dear Friends,

RCAL, the Resource Center for Accessible Living, your Ulster County Independent Living Center has had many wonderful firsts thru the years.

- In 1983 we opened at our first location on Broadway in Kingston
- In 2008 we purchased our first Building
- In 1989 we loaned our first item
- We got approved the first Nursing Home Transition Diversion Waiver in New York State
- We have witnessed, First Steps, First Words, First Jobs, we have cried many happy tears.

2020 and COVID -19 has also Brought RCAL Many firsts.

- First time we ever locked our doors to keep out individuals, an act our staff sees as unforgivable.
- First Glass Partitions are being installed to separate us from the wonderful people we serve, shameful
- First time people refused our services out of fear of what harm could come, terrible.
- These are firsts we never imagined we would see, we have cried many heartfelt and sad tears these many days.

But Our Staff, Our RCALians are tough and we are working from home, working from the field and doing what we can.

- Bringing groceries and other items to individuals for whom it is unsafe to go out at this time.
- Donating to Project Resilience
- Advising the county
- Going virtual with our Traumatic Brain Injury Support Group
- Attending Board, and Staff meeting on Zoom.
- Attending Committee on Special Education Meetings by Phone
- Electronic Check-in’s
- Virtual Benefits Advisement

We continue to work with our individuals in every way we can. Soon, but not soon enough, our world will reawaken from the shocked slumber we have been living in. We will never go back to the world we lived in, but we will together, you, me and all of our RCALion’s will figure it out, find our way and live our best lives together. Finding, reopening, rebuilding and creating the services that are needed for our community. Hang tight everyone, we are here for you. We know you are out there for us. We need you as well. We miss you, we love you and we are here, just leave us a message, we will call you back and see what is possible. You never know what we can do together. I promise we will cry happy tears together again.

Anthony
As we navigate uncharted waters as a nation, our students are finding themselves in virtual classrooms across the country. For students who are receiving special education via an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), services may look very different than what was being delivered at their local school. This change in delivery of services may affect their full mastery of their IEP goals so it’s important to know your students’ rights during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If your student is an IEP student, it’s important to know all the services they are entitled to receive under IDEA. For example, how often are they to receive speech? OT? Reteach? Do the districts still have to follow the IEPs? Those services though being delivered in that virtual format should still be delivered. The district is still expected to follow the IEP, though the emphasis is now on maintenance rather than actual expectations of mastery during the COVID-19 closure. Vigilance is important if you feel your student has regressed during this closure, write down the changes noted from before to now. The home environment has now become the “learning environment.”

As a parent if you have any questions or concerns regarding the delivery of services to your student, you have the right to contact your student’s staff, district’s special education department, related service providers and so forth. Your right to still participate and/or call for an IEP meeting is no different than it was before. You also maintain the right to invite anyone you want to those virtual meetings by letting the district know in advance so a link may be provided for those individuals to join at the date and time of said meeting.

~Stay safe, Gloria Toporowski

The United States Department of Education has posted a question and answer fact sheet on their website with regards to special education students and district’s responsibilities at the following link:


Gloria Toporowski, RCAL’s Special Education advocate can be reached at 845-331-0541 x 14 or gtoporowski@rcal.org
think we should all feel like someone’s grandma is feeding us on a regular basis. My Nana taught me how to show love through food, and I try to keep that legacy going,” says Rachel Kandel, owner of Nana’s Creative Cafe in Woodstock, NY. She’s been serving delicious breakfast sandwiches, coffee, baked goods, salads, and other savory delights for five years. Her cafe, lovingly named in honor of her grandmother, is a local gem that is most-frequented by people on their way to school or work.

When Governor Andrew Cuomo released his executive order limiting restaurant services, like many other business owners, Rachel panicked. “It had become clear early on that egg sandwiches and coffee were not going to be enough to support the financial needs of Nana’s and my staff.”

Under such extreme circumstances, we have to be creative, and like the cafe’s name boasts, Rachel did just that. With the help of her sister, she has re-designed her business to stay afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic by temporarily transforming her cafe to a frozen-meal service, offering completely contact-free curbside pick-up, as well as delivery within 7 miles of the cafe.

Customers can order their meals, pay, and select the pickup day online at www.nanascreativecafe.com. The website shows pictures of what each meal looks like so that the customers know what to expect, as well as the heating instructions.

When the customer arrives at Nana’s, they can call Rachel from their car and she will place the order on a table out-side the front door. Once she re-enters the cafe, the customer can then come out and pick up the food. The transactions have been seamless and the food oh-so-delicious!

The menu offers some of the staples that Nana’s has been known for: breakfast sandwiches, burritos, quinoa bowls, and of course, an assortment of mouth-watering baked goods.

It’s also easy to see that Rachel is having fun crafting new dishes! Pesto alfredo mac-n-cheese, buffalo chicken ravioli bake, teriyaki turkey meatballs are just a few of the many new options available for purchase since the change to frozen-meals. “Scoop-and-bake” cookie-dough batters are also available and can be a fun activity for children and adults alike during the stay-at-home orders.

Rachel is mindful that not everyone may have access to or the ability to utilize a computer. Nana’s Creative Cafe is going above and beyond by calling customers twice a week to read the menus, assist in ordering, and arrange delivery. Her goal is to make accessibility to a variety of comfort food as easy as possible for the people in her community, especially those who are homebound. This service has been especially helpful for locals who are elderly and individuals with disabilities.

For more information on Nana’s frozen meals, you can call the cafe at 845-679-8400, visit Nana’s on Facebook or www.nanascreativecafe.com

by Christine Castellana, RCAL Employment Specialist
In 2018, the Pinegrove Dude Ranch became the **all new pine ridge dude ranch**. Located at the foothills of the Catskills, just a little over 20 minutes south/west of Kingston is a truly all-inclusive dude ranch and resort that has something for everyone, including guests with special needs. Guests can experience a year-round, cozy, laid-back, family-friendly atmosphere whether they’re looking for a vacation, staycation or day-cation outdoor experience.

In addition to a range of family and group activities planned daily by a creative and seasoned Activities Director, Pine Ridge Dude Ranch successfully serves groups from the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) and from the Tri-State area, and supports the hiring of individuals with special needs.

Every effort is made to customize each guests’ experience based upon their needs and goals for their visit. Rooms and common areas are handicap accessible and housekeeping goes above and beyond to meet guests’ needs. The dining area is designed for families and groups and the wait staff is warm and welcoming. A gift shop offers a wide variety of items such as shirts, sweatshirts, lounging pants, souvenirs, cowboy boots and hats, toys and jewelry. Arcade areas, bar/lounge, indoor/outdoor pool, tennis court, jump cushion, climbing wall, archery and the critter pen areas are accessible. Paintball tractor rides, paddle boats and fishing are available on a seasonal basis. Day-care for “pint-size wranglers” is also available.

Last but not least, there are the renowned trail rides thru miles of rustic acreage overlooking the scenic Shawangunk Ridge with views of the Mohonk Mountain. The Ranch is noted for a highly rated Barn Program with 52 trained trail horses who provide guests, ages 9 and

(continued on page 7)
above, of all ability levels (from never-ever begin-ners to intermediate and advanced riders) rides over terrain that highlight the breathtak-ing scenic views of the Shawangunk Ridge and Mohonk Mountain. Guests wishing to go out on trail rides are given basic riding instruction and screened for safety prior to the scheduled ride. If safety is of a concern, the guest will be offered the Corral Program option best suited to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience. The Corral Program includes introductory lessons which focus on skill development such as ground work, mounting/dismounting, basic riding and above all confidence. Corral rides are for youth and adults who wish to ride in a more controlled en-vironment other than the rugged trails. Riders remain in the corral area and are assisted by a trained wrangler who leads the horse in-hand with the rider or provides side-walker support as needed. Pony rides are available for children ages 7 & under. For guests who choose not to ride but would like to interact with the horses, a “touch n’ brush” experience can easily be provided. Horses can be brought to the hotel area for guests who are not able to or choose not to come to the barn area. In addition to the trail rides and corral program, the Barn Pro-gram offers Barn Buddies, a behind the scene, hands-on experience to life in a barn before the trail rides begin, that includes a guided tour, instruction on grooming and proper tacking of a horse, feeding, mucking and sweeping stalls. Private rides and horsemanship classes and lectures are also available.

The barn staff are trained professionals in the care of the horses and trail guide management. Many of the staff come from a variety of related backgrounds such as special education, direct support of those with physical, mental and beha-vioral challenges and even sign language.

For more information or a reservation call: 845-626-7345; EMAIL: reservations@pineridgeduderanch.com or visit the website: pineridgeduderanch.com

Need to request an absentee ballot for the June 23, 2020 Primary?

According to the New York State Board of Elections Website, absentee ballot applications “must be mailed, emailed or faxed to your county board no later than the seventh day before the election or delivered in person no later than the day before the election.

www.elections.ny.gov/VotingAbsentee.html
RCAL SUPPORT GROUPS CAN HELP YOU:


Currently, due to Covid 19, RCAL’s Traumatic Brain Injury Group is meeting virtually. Please call us at 845-331-0541 and leave a message requesting information. We look forward to returning to our regular schedule for this group as well as for Amputee Support, Autism Social Skills and Alzheimer’s Caregivers.

RCAL Support Groups are a welcoming, accessible, safe place to learn and share feelings, fears, hopes, ideas, and experiences. You can learn information about specific concerns, develop new coping mechanisms, grow, receive encouragement and emotional support, support others, become empowered, and share with other people who may be experiencing similar issues.

Putting you in Control

Information Regarding Economic Impact Payments for Social Security and SSI Beneficiaries with Representative Payees, and People Living in U.S. Territories

The Social Security Administration issued an update today about COVID-19 Economic Impact Payments (EIP) to certain groups of Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries. Beneficiaries who have their regular monthly payments managed for them by another person, called a representative payee, will begin receiving their EIPs from the IRS in late May.

For more information, please visit https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/releases/. 
IN THE NEWS...

**Judge orders Cuomo to make Covid-19 briefings more accessible to deaf New Yorkers**

by Tom Precious, reprinted from *The Buffalo News, May 11, 2020*

A federal judge Monday evening ordered Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo to follow the lead of what governors, mayors and county executives across the United States routinely offer every day: the prominent use of a sign language interpreter during his daily Covid press briefings so tens of thousands of deaf New Yorkers can keep up to date on the latest coronavirus updates from Albany.

The Cuomo administration had pushed back against a lawsuit by Disability Rights New York, an advocacy group that last month sued the Democratic governor to try to force him to immediately commence “in-frame” broadcasts of his Covid briefings with a sign language interpreter.

The Cuomo administration Monday evening said it set up a dedicated internet stream that is viewed by thousands of people daily. “The decision is being reviewed by counsel,” said Richard Azzopardi, a senior advisor to Cuomo.

A lawyer for Attorney General Letitia James, who represents Cuomo in the case, wrote the judge Monday evening to say they expect the court order to be followed starting Wednesday morning, according to court papers.
ALTHOUGH DILIGENTLY ADHERING TO THE GUIDELINES OF SOCIAL DISTANCING, RCAL’S BOARD IS STILL TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS!

Individuals who reside in a nursing home setting are still entitled and will receive a stimulus check. Nursing homes receive participants’ monthly income; SSI, SSD, etc. The stimulus check is NOT to be counted as income and while it will be mailed to the same address that the participants SS check is mailed to, the nursing home should not be taking the funds, they should be dispersed to the individual directly. Please contact your nursing homes ombudsman should you have concerns or questions pertaining to you or your loved ones stimulus payment.
The Mental Health Empowerment Project Presents:

Hearing Voices?
You’re Not Alone

A virtual group. Come and see what it is all about!

Although 1 in 10 people hear voices, many choose not to talk about them. A Hearing Voices Group is a place where people can meet to talk about their experiences without fear of judgement. It offers mutual support and friendship, with the opportunity to explore your experiences and learn from others with similar stories.

Meetings held every Friday through June 5th, 5-6pm

Join Zoom Meeting at https://zoom.us/i/99142114991 Meeting ID: 991 4211 4991

One Tap Mobile:
+1-646-876-9923,,99142114991# US (New York)
+1-312-626-6799,,99142114991# (Chicago)

Dial by your location:
+1-646-876-9923 US (New York)  |  +1-312-626-6799 US (Chicago)
+1-301-715-8592 US  |  +1-346-248-7799 US (Houston)
+1-669-900-6833 US (San Jose)  |  +1-253-215-8782 US

Meeting ID: 991-4211-4991

Find your local number: https://zoom.us/u/a2xm0r9kq

Any Questions?

Please call John Lyn or Victor Clark at RISE Center (914)-664-3444
Or email J Lyn@mhepinc.org or V Clark@mhepinc.org

The R.I.S.E. Center is a program of Mental Health Empowerment Project
Hi everybody! I work in the office at RCAL. I’m just to the right of the front desk in a little office I share with my mom. I meet a lot of people and make a lot of friends. Right now, Mom and I are working from home, well, she’s working from home anyway, I’m mostly laying on the couch or chewing on stuff. Sometimes I get in trouble for the chewing part. It’s weird, some things I’m allowed to chew, some things I get in BIG trouble when I chew. How are you supposed to know?

My office has a gate on the door to keep my mom in. She gets out sometimes anyway. I like to hide in the corner and watch the people go by. People come in for all different kinds of things. I see everybody that comes in. Sometimes they come in to borrow stuff and my mom or someone else goes way across the parking lot to help them. Sometimes they come in to get a check. Sometimes they ask for Debbie to help them figure complicated stuff like Social Security and Pooled Trusts and I know when they ask for Debbie that means I will get a cookie when Debbie walks them out.

There’s nice young people who come in to work on how to get a better job. Sometimes on Thursdays a whole bunch of people go into the conference room with Marge and she talks about getting jobs really loud.

The telephone rings all the time at RCAL. My mom’s always answering it and saying, I can help you with that, or I know someone who can help you with that or let me get someone else to help you with that. She never says no. Nobody at RCAL ever says no. Except to me when I jump up because I get excited.

I can’t wait to get back to work. My mom and me and all the other humans have a lot of people we need to help. I hope they’re okay while we’re not there. Life on my couch is BORING. Sometimes I hear my mom on the phone talking about how we need to raise more money to keep helping people. She’s really worried sometimes. There’s no place like RCAL, she says, no place else where everyone is welcome and everyone will find the help they need or find out where else they can go for help.

So what I’m thinking is, if everyone who knows RCAL can press the give button and give a little something, we’ll all be back together, better than ever, when this is all over. And if you have any leftover bones or toys, I could help you out with them.

~Wanda’s Mom
# RCAL DEPARTMENTS

## ADMINISTRATION
- **Anthony Mignone** | Chief Executive Officer
- **Kathy Hochman** | Chief Operating Officer
- **Tina Bogart** | Office Administrator

## ADVOCATES
- **Debbie Denise** | Benefits Advisor
- **Keith Gurgui** | Systems Advocate

## COMMUNITY HABILITATION & RESPITE
- **Brenda DeBaun** | Supervisor of Community Habilitation & Waiver Respite

## EDUCATION
- **Gloria Toporowski** | Special Education Advocate

## COMMUNITY-BASED CARE MANAGEMENT
- **Katie Clayton** | Supervisor of Community-Based Care Management

## REPRESENTATIVE PAYEE
- **Qiwanna Hylton** | Rep Payee Supervisor

## LOAN CLOSET / ACCESSIBILITY
- **Gilles Malkine** | Architectural Modification, Loan Closet Representative / Accessibility Consultant

## SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT
- **Hillary Nichols** | Supervisor of Employment Services / ACCES-VR Information

---

## MISSION STATEMENT
RCAL’s mission is to facilitate independence, choice, accessibility, and participation in all aspects of life.

WE BELIEVE IN
- Respect
- Integrity
- Commitment to Service

## VISION STATEMENT
Our vision is to live in a fully accessible, integrated community without barriers for people with disabilities.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS
- **Claudette Ford**, Chair
- **Paula Kindos-Carbbery**, Vice Chair
- **Paul Scarpati**, Secretary
- R. Marie Altenau
- **Joan Gundersen**, Emeritus
- **Craig Lopez**
- **Janice Loring**
- **Sheila Kilpatrick**
- **Mark McFadden**
- **Kathy McMahon**
- **Brooke Nelson**
- Melissa Rappleyea

---

Please LIKE us on FACEBOOK