Budget Cuts to 4201 schools?

By Dean DeRusso, Deaf Systems Advocate

Today, many of us are concerned about state budget cuts; and often these cuts hurt the most vulnerable.

However, in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, the primary concern is access to effective communication: most of the time this involves education and employment advocacy.

Recently Governor Cuomo proposed to remove government support to schools for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Blind and Visually Impaired, called “4201 schools,” and place these services under local districts.

Dating back to the early 1800’s, 4201 schools were started as Schools for the Blind and Deaf. Their success led New York State in 1895 to add special language to the state constitution to ensure that the education of deaf and blind people would be preserved. Today, there are twelve 4201 schools, including one State School for the Deaf, in New York State.

The biggest difference between the twelve 4201 schools and mainstream schools is that 4201 schools have individual board of directors. They are also spread out in different parts of the state to help ensure that children are closer to their families. The one exception is the State School for the Deaf, in Rome, NY, which is funded and monitored by the State. Advocates for 4201 schools warn that Cuomo should be more careful with his proposal, as he is throwing away a history of 200 years of education for the deaf and blind.

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Hello! My name is Dawn Jeffords, and I am the new bilingual (Spanish/English) Manager of Youth Services and the Spina Bifida Resource Center here at RCIL. Currently I oversee three programs: three unique support groups, the Ready to Achieve Mentoring Program (RAMP), and the Spina Bifida Resource Center.

The support groups are categorized by three individualized groups: men, women, and family support. Each group is consumer driven by their interests and needs for group topics. Previously we have attended Red Wings/Amerks games and held tea parties.

On Monday, April 4, we held a Skin Care Night for both men and women. Additionally, on Tuesday, April 12 at 6 PM, and Tuesday, April 26 at 9:30 PM, we are hosting workshops on safety and healthy relationships for all ages and genders. Furthermore, we are looking forward to introducing new interactive youth groups, as well as informational seminars for parents and caregivers on transitioning individuals to preschool, school-age, and post secondary education.

RAMP is a career-focused program based in Wayne County that assists youth with disabilities currently involved with, or at-risk of being involved with, the juvenile justice system. While in RAMP, youths have numerous opportunities to reach independently set goals while exploring careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) with a STEM mentor.

RAMP uses a variety of mentoring approaches: one-on-one student to STEM mentor interaction, peer and group mentoring in order to successfully promote youth transition from RAMP to employment, career-focused choices, and independent living.

The Spina Bifida Resource Center (SBRC) provides free information and referral to the public while providing benefits that reach a wide range of consumers. SBRC is dedicated to fostering communities in which all individuals with spina bifida are prepared and empowered by having access to education, health care information, and employment options in their community. Additionally, we can provide presentations to the community and other agencies on a variety of topics.

If we do not offer what you are looking for, just ask! We are more than glad to discuss developing a unique presentation to meet your needs.

The Youth Services and SBRC department will be holding numerous workshops and group activities continually through the year. Mark your calendar for June 15 from 1 PM – 4 PM, as we will be hosting our annual Volunteer Fair. Please check our website at rcil.org for more information and for updates regarding upcoming events.

If you have any questions or want more information about the services RCIL provides, contact Dawn Jeffords at (585) 442-6470 or djeffords@rcil.org.
Our Best Kept Secret: The Early Intervention Loan Closet

The RCIL Technology Related Assistance to Individuals with Disabilities (TRAID)/Early Intervention loan closet is one of the best kept secrets around, but we never intended for it to be a secret! There are so many wonderful pieces for Early Intervention including various children’s devices and equipment that are just waiting to be borrowed.

The wide variety of equipment in our Early Intervention loan closet make it possible for Physical and Occupational therapists to choose equipment and try it out before buying it for the child— which can potentially take months from start to finish.

Anyone may request a visit to the loan closet to see if they could use one of the adaptive devices or technology. Items in the loan closet include: standers, gait trainers, manual wheelchairs, big button switches and communicators, peg puzzles, tumble forms, corner positioning seats, bath chairs, toddler and youth positioning car seats, little trikes, and sensory devices.

It is easy to borrow a piece of equipment: all you have to do is call (585) 442-6470 or walk into our State Street location and ask for Heidi Cornelius.

Our office is located at 497 State Street, Rochester, NY 14608 and is open Monday-Friday, 9:00 AM- 5:00 PM.

Training to Serve You Better

In July 2010, Stephan Hall, the Benefits Specialist for the Regional Center for Independent Living (RCIL), attended a week-long national Social Security Administration’s Benefits Planning, Assistance, and Outreach Educational Training seminar through the New York Makes Work Pay Initiative. According to Stephan, he saw this training as "an opportunity to gather new information and develop new skills that will help me serve RCIL’s consumers better."

Six months later in January 2011, Stephan received his provisional (12-month) certification as a Benefits and Work Incentives Practitioner after completing and passing a comprehensive online examination. His next step toward permanent (five-year) certification will require him to pass a rigorous case file review conducted by faculty at Cornell University’s Employment and Disability Institute (EDI).
“Independent Living means that we demand the same choices and control in our everyday lives that our non-disabled brothers and sisters, neighbors and friends take for granted. We want to grow up in our families, go to the neighborhood school, use the same bus as our neighbors, work in jobs that are in line with our education and interests, and raise families of our own. We are profoundly ordinary people sharing the same need to feel included, recognized and loved.”

- Dr. Adolf Ratzka

I agree with the very statement made by Dr. Adolf Ratzka, in particular, where we want to feel included, recognized and loved. Being included, recognized and loved is the very essence of our existence in this society. That is why we strive to empower everyone to make their own choices, to take control of their daily lives, raise families, and to work just as any “ordinary” people would. We want to help you be able to show your loved ones, your friends, and your employers what you are truly capable of. As an Independent Living Specialist at RCIL, this is my goal.

My job is to educate, empower, and advocate for members of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (HOH) community. Independent living skills are the skills needed to perform everyday tasks: we can assist you in learning these skills in order to become more independent.

Want to be more independent but need help with public transportation? Independent Living Specialists can teach you how to utilize public transportation effectively. If you need help with filling out a job application, we can walk you through it. If you need help with assistive technologies that have not been made available to you before, then we can try to apply for proper documentation. If you need help with understanding the SSI/SSD letters, we can try to clarify them for you in American Sign Language. It doesn’t stop there: these are merely a few examples of the multiple ways we at RCIL can inform, educate and empower.

The following is a specific example of ways we can help empower our consumers: There was a time when a consumer came to our office and explained to us that the amount of money he was getting from Social Security was cut in half. He was frustrated because he could not understand the letter he received from SSA. After our meeting, we called SSA and scheduled an appointment with a Sign Language interpreter. On the day of his appointment, I was there to support and guide him through the process. He reported his new address and they increased his benefits to the full amount. He used our services at RCIL to gain an understanding of how SSA works.

RCIL wants individuals to know that whatever the challenge they may face, they don’t have to face it alone. It is our job to make you feel included, recognized, and loved. We want to be there for you every step of the way. Please feel free to give us a call or see us in person and we will see what we can do for you. Need assistance? Email Erin at ephillips@rcil.org
On April Fool’s Day, it will be no joke to Roberta (Bobbi) Wallach when she moves into her own apartment. The 53 year-old Fairport Baptist Homes’ resident, who was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis at the age of 21, says it’s a move she’s long awaited for. Wallach has been a resident of Fairport Baptist Homes since 2008, when it became increasingly difficult for her family to assist Wallach in her daily needs. “We couldn’t afford 24-hour home care, and there didn’t seem to be any other option at the time,” said Wallach. That was then. Now, since becoming an active member of ADAPT, Wallach has learned she does have options.

ADAPT is a national grass-roots community whose purpose is to organize disability rights activists in nonviolent protestation to bring awareness to—and assure—the civil and human rights of individuals who live with disabilities.

One of ADAPT’s missions is to support the Community Choice Act (CCA), a community-based alternative to nursing homes and institutions for people with disabilities. Once an individual with a disability is deemed eligible for institutional services, this bill will enable these individuals, or their representatives, to choose where and how these services will be provided. This is something that Wallach staunchly believes in.

“There’s no reason why I can’t live in my own apartment because I am confined to a wheelchair. Just because the government thinks I need to be in a nursing facility, doesn’t mean that’s the way it should be. I may be disabled, but I’m not incapable,” she says.

While Wallach is mostly confined to a motorized wheelchair, she will be able to navigate her apartment, and will receive 90 hours of care a week. The people at CDR will help modify her apartment to make sure it is handicapped accessible. She has even had her bed donated. Still, not everyone has been given these options.

That is why Wallach has made approximately a dozen trips to our nation’s capitol with her ADAPT counterparts, advocating for people just like herself. “This has given me the courage to do things; protesting for people who can’t do it for themselves.”

Wallach also recently made a quick trip to Corning, NY to meet with Tom Reed personally to explain that if people with disabilities can get out of the institutions and get into the community, that not only is it more cost-effective, but that these individuals can become contributors to the community. “It’s much easier and more beneficial than ware-housing disabled people,” she says.

On February 15, she traveled to Albany to spread that same message. In April, she will travel to Washington, D.C. once more. At her age, there is still so much

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she wants to do, and can do. “I’m doing exactly what I protest to do. I’m taking advantage of the community choices.” Currently, Wallach is attending Empire State College to earn her Bachelor’s Degree in Disability Rights, and says she will be back to visit her many friends at Fairport Baptist Homes (FBH) every week.

“This places gives me spirit,” she says. “So many people have been so supportive of me, and I won’t forget that.”

As an advocate for persons with handicaps to remain living in the community instead of institutions, Wallach feels this is a big step. Not only is she talking the talk, she’s now, so to speak, walking the walk.

For example, the seat modular feeding seating system (shown on page 3) was just returned to our loan closet from a family who utilized it for comfort and positioning on an airplane seat.

We also accept donations of adaptive equipment that you no longer need.

To donate your equipment, please contact Marsha Sweet or Email msweet@rcil.org
4201 Schools  Continued from page 1

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing community insist on maintaining 4201 schools for a number of reasons. In the past, local school districts did not properly assess deaf and hard of hearing students for their Individualized Education Plans (IEP). People also feel that this proposal will jeopardize the rights of deaf and hard of hearing children for equal education. Another concern is the self-esteem of the children; some believe that mainstreamed deaf children do not have the same opportunity to participate in school activities like sports, yearbook planning, and other afterschool activities.

One unique aspect of the Rochester School for the Deaf (RSD), one of the eleven 4201 schools in New York, is that many former alumni of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) move back to Rochester just because RSD is a good school. Simply put, they want their kids to attend RSD.

This sense of dedication and determination was seen on Thursday, March 10, 2011, when many of the 4201 schools,—sending several buses, alumni, faculty and students—as well as several staff from RCIL and CDR, rallied at the Legislative Office Building in Albany to protest Governor Cuomo’s proposal, which involved budget cuts of over 80% to 4201 schools. Students, parents and faculty wrote letters and signed petitions, convinced the budget cuts were not in the best interest of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

But as of March 31st, contrary to Governor Cuomo’s proposal, funding for the eleven schools was restored by the State Legislature. In total, state leaders committed to a $98 million restoration to ensure that the schools—based in Buffalo, Rochester, White Plains, New York City and Long Island—continue to operate seamlessly and without disruption. Under this agreement, a dedicated funding stream—applicable only to 4201 costs—will be provided by the state to local school districts and paid on a quarterly basis to the schools.

The 4201 schools received unanimous support in both houses of the legislature, signifying yet another advocacy success and triumph for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community.

Training  Continued from page 3

"I've already used a lot of the information from the training to advocate for the consumers with whom I work," says Stephan, "and I'm confident and ready for this next step." Applying what he learned, Stephan has been able to help a number of consumers get into work incentive programs like the Medicaid Buy-In Program for Working People with Disabilities (MBI-WPD).

Stephan will work closely with his two colleagues from the Benefits Advisement Unit who are already credentialed Benefits and Work Incentives Practitioners to complete the next steps to obtain his permanent certification.

According to Rebecca Payton, Manager of Benefits Advisement Services at RCIL, "the knowledge and skills Stephan has gained through this training program allow the unit to serve its consumers even more effectively, efficiently, and quickly."
Minimum contribution $10 per year.
Membership year is November 1 – October 31.

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