

# INDEPENDENT TIMES

Newsletter of the Regional Center for Independent Living · Spring 2012

Ray Kenney  
*Board Chair*

Bruce E. Darling  
*President/CEO*



## ***Our Mission***

is to empower people with disabilities to self-advocate, to live independently and to enhance the quality of community life. We seek to overcome the barriers faced by people with disabilities who choose to live independently.

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## **Access to Home Grant: Promoting Independence in the Community**

The Regional Center for Independent Living (RCIL) and Marketview Heights Association (MHA) are once again combining efforts to assist 10 owner-occupied homeowners in modifying their homes. Homeowners who are 60% and below the Area Median Income, individuals with a permanent physical disability limiting daily activity, as well as the frail and elderly, are eligible for this program. Income exceptions may be made for veterans with disabilities.

The Division of Housing and Community Renewal has approved the funding application for the “Access to Home” program to allow RCIL and MHA to again work cooperatively within the limits of the City of Rochester to make accessibility improvements. These changes allow the target population to remain at home, in a safe and comfortable environment, rather than entering a restrictive institutional setting.

***These changes allow people to remain at home, in a safe and comfortable environment.***

Individuals who are interested in this program are to be referred to RCIL for an intake interview to go over the application process and the required documentation—which may include proof of household income, proof of homeownership (deed), medical assessment of need, proof of residence, proof of home owners insurance and paid tax bills.

When all documentation is verified and application financials are approved by RCIL, the file is then forwarded to MHA for follow up to work with the consumer.

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# Fostering Youth Programs for Teens, Young Adults



Alex Wegman with her service dog Bright

*RCIL is pleased to announce a new member of the team, Alex Wegman, the Youth Services Coordinator. Learn some more about Alex and her goals for new youth programs:*

I'm Alex Wegman. I love kids, and I plan to be one until I grow up (that's funny, because it's the kind of joke your grandpa would tell). I also have a bad habit of explaining my jokes. My lovely four-legged friend is named Bright, and she's basically an extension of my body. Her biggest job is pulling me when we have long distances to travel. She's all business at work, but she's a maniac of a lab when we get home and she's at ease.

I'm 24 and I grew up in the incredibly wheelchair accessible Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St. Paul), Minnesota. There were still access challenges, particularly in school, but public buildings in Minnesota are all relatively new, so I had it easy; there were also lots of recreation and development programs targeted at kids like me.

My parents pushed me hard to advocate for myself and to own my experiences. My mom's an amputee, so I had the benefit of a parent who knew from experience that a disability isn't a death sentence. As a teen, I took pride in the way that my disability made me different; I had opportunities for experiences that my peers didn't, and I had the ability to connect with people on a very raw level due to my unique perspective on the world. My educational background is in psychology, and as a college student, I knew I wanted to work with youth in some capacity - particularly those with disabilities.

Fate (also known as Husband) brought me to Rochester in 2008, just a few months after I graduated. I'm here at RCIL now as the Coordinator of Youth Services, and am working on a few projects I'm really excited about. They're inspired by the things I had access to that I know impacted my sense of self and responsibility. I'm working on providing social activities for teens and young adults with disabilities and other youth leadership opportunities.

My biggest task at the moment is researching and putting together the plan for a youth mentoring program. I believe that kids with disabilities are often excluded from such programs in the mainstream by lack of accessibility. They need to have adult influences that have disabilities and can relate to their struggles and successes, so I'm going to work hard to make that happen in Rochester.

My hope is to foster a culture of young people that are proud of who they are, understand what they need, and are ready to take the responsibility of making positive change in their communities. If you are interested in getting involved, I'd love to meet you! To contact me, call (585) 442-6470 or email me at [awegman@rcil.org](mailto:awegman@rcil.org).

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## Former Marine Turns Experience into Guidance

RCIL welcomes another new member to the team, John Muto, the new Veterans Outreach Specialist. Thanks to his past work at a similar agency, and experience as a Marine, he brings a wide variety of contacts and networking resources both locally in the Rochester area and nationally.

John joined the Marine Corps in 1990, right after high school. He explains, “As I watched my long hair drop to the floor, I knew my life was going to be changed forever.” In the Marine Corps he was an Anti-terrorist Expert, and later became a Drill Instructor. Throughout his years of service, being deployed everywhere and anywhere, he learned that being a Marine was not just about the uniform, but the discipline of developing brotherhood among his fellow Marines. It was also about helping those that cannot help themselves. This lesson he learned he continues to carry with him after being discharged, and into his professional role here at RCIL.



John Muto

John explains that his main responsibilities as the Veterans Outreach Specialist include: advocating for veterans, “to give them what they deserve...being their voice if they have no voice,” supporting them as a peer, and assisting them in applying for benefits, such as the DSS application.

He continues to strive towards the goal of securing independence for veterans, getting them on the right track, and also simply raising community awareness of the services that are available. “My true love is working with veterans that need an extra hand, or as I call it, a ‘hand up,’ to becoming as independent as possible,” says John.

“I live my life like a Marine,” he explains, “Full of self-discipline and watching out for others...I will do my best to translate this belief into my job.”

For more information on veteran assistance, please contact John at (585) 442-6470 or [jmuto@rcil.org](mailto:jmuto@rcil.org).

*Did you know? John is also a Patriot Rider (part of a motorcycle club whose members attend the funerals of US armed force members) and his passion for motorcycles will lead him to participating in “Rolling Thunder,” a motorcycle rally taking place in May in Washington, DC that attracts over 50,000 motorcycle enthusiasts—veterans and non-veterans—from around the world each year.*

Join our team!

Employment opportunities are frequently posted on [www.rcil.org](http://www.rcil.org).  
See what fits your talents and interest.  
For more information, please contact Marsha Sweet  
[msweet@rcil.org](mailto:msweet@rcil.org) or call (585) 442-6470.

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## Leading by Example: Bobby Greco Jr.



Bobby Greco Jr. (left) coaches practice at Saint John Fisher College

On May 31st, 2012, the Youth Transition Department at RCIL will host the first in a series of events called *Leading by Example*. Bobby Greco, Jr., Assistant Football Coach at St. John Fisher College, will be at 497 State Street from 6-8 pm that evening, along with a few of the students he coaches.

Coach Greco, who uses a wheelchair, will talk about his experiences as a young professional breaking into the career of his choice, and how his disability has impacted his path. St. John Fisher College has the opportunity to set up a table on admissions and accommodations, and there may be door prizes for people who attend and bring a friend!

This event is open to the public and free of charge.

Contact Alex Wegman for questions at:

[awegman@rcil.org](mailto:awegman@rcil.org)

(585) 442-6470

Greco also helps out at the Buffalo Bills' Training Camp over the summer, hosted at St. John Fisher College



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## Voter's Registration Drive 2012

On February 15th and 17th, 2012, the Regional Center for Independent Living hosted a Voter's Registration Drive with the Center for Disability Rights Assistant Director of Advocacy, Dave Atias, at the National Technical Institution for the Deaf (NTID). Special thanks to the Student Life Team and the volunteers from NTID's student organizations for helping make the event a success.

At NTID a large number of students and teachers received information about voting and how to register to vote.

If you are interested and want to learn more about voting or how to register to vote, call RCIL at (585) 442-6470.

Interesting facts about voting:

- Deaf citizens of Egypt cannot vote; they are not considered equal to hearing citizens.
- Women still cannot vote in Saudi Arabia; this applies to deaf women as well.
- U.S. Federal Law prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in the voting process. Regardless of whether you vote at a polling place, or by advance ballot, you have the right to access your polling place.

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## **Access to Home** *Continued from page 1*

They then help identify the services needed to address accessibility barriers in their homes.

MHA oversees the scope of the work as they work with contractors and the bidding process to provide those needed services under the Access to Homes grant. The total cost must not exceed \$25,000 per home. MHA reserves the right to reject selected units with known health and safety hazards unless those hazards are addressed prior to the use of Access to Home funding.

In 2010 RCIL and MHA teamed up to successfully modify the homes of 10 owner-occupied homes inside the City limits. These low income individuals with disabilities benefited from being able to stay in their homes and now enjoy the comfort of accessibility, after struggling with barriers that would have meant their families having to put a loved one in an institutional setting.

Through this program RCIL was able to provide modifications for a large range of accessibility needs, such as wheelchair ramps, widening of doorways, bathroom changes for wheelchair access, stair lifts and more. Thanks to Access, RCIL was able to provide services to a veteran with a disability, who once served our country.

RCIL would like to duplicate its success of 2011 and help provide individuals with disabilities dealing with accessibility barriers the modifications they require to stay in their home.

For more information and application assistance please contact: Jane Chase at (585) 442-6470 or [jchase@rcil.org](mailto:jchase@rcil.org).

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For more information on registering to vote, visit [www.rochestervoteralliance.org](http://www.rochestervoteralliance.org).

Mark your calendars! RCIL Board Meetings:  
**Thursday, June 21st, 2-4pm & Thursday, August 16th, 2-4pm**  
497 State Street, Rochester, NY

Members are encouraged to attend

## See what's happening online!

Go to <http://www.rcil.org> for more information on our services and advocacy  
or go to one of our social media pages below



<http://www.facebook.com/rcilnys>



<http://www.twitter.com/rcilny>

<http://www.youtube.com/rcilvideo>

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## Program Highlight: Client Assistance Program

If you have ever had a problem with Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES-VR), Commission for Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH) or Centers for Independent Living (CIL), RCIL's Client Assistance Program (CAP) can help.

CAP is a network of skilled advocates that assist New Yorkers with disabilities in obtaining the training, equipment and services needed from ACCES-VR, CBVH or CIL. RCIL provides CAP in 10 counties: Monroe, Chemung, Livingstone, Ontario, Seneca, Schuyler, Steuben, Tompkins, Wayne and Yates Counties. For more information, please call (585) 442-6470 (V/TTY) or email [msweet@rcil.org](mailto:msweet@rcil.org).

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## Martial Arts for RCIL Adult Peer Groups

Starting this spring, RCIL Youth Transition Department will be offering Martial Arts classes for individuals involved in Spina Bifida Resource Center Peer Groups. A local Judo gym will be adapting techniques for people with disabilities.

If you're not currently part of a peer group and are a person with a disability, contact Kara Supple with questions about what's offered, how to get involved, and more information about the upcoming Martial Arts classes: at [ksupple@rcil.org](mailto:ksupple@rcil.org) or (585) 442-6470.

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## New Loan Closet Items for Children



This winter RCIL received a generous donation of medical equipment from the University of Rochester Golisano Children's Hospital at Strong, through the Theodore and Cashmere Mendick Foundation.

The donations included five EZ-on M203 vests, three EZ-on 101M2 vests (harnesses to help transfer children with disabilities in body casts who can not get into any type of car seat), and three Snug 2000 Hippo car seats for infants and young children in SPICA body casts.



These pieces of equipment are available free for loan in RCIL's loan closet to families who are referred by the U of R staff.

To borrow, please call Marsha Sweet at (585) 442-6470 or email at [msweet@rcil.org](mailto:msweet@rcil.org).

Examples of the EZ-on M203 vests (top), and the Snug 2000 Hippo car seats for children in SPICA body casts (lower)

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# Efforts to Increase Voter Turnout within the Deaf Community in Binghamton, NY

By Dean DeRusso, *Deaf Systems Advocate*

It is often common that many Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals are frustrated with the government. As a result, they choose not to vote at all. However, many people might think, “if you’re frustrated with the government, why wouldn’t you vote?”

I remember years ago when I was trying to convince people to vote, I told someone that approximately 80% of the people in the U.S. vote. Later I found out that figure was not even close. I should have done my research first.

I learned that in 2004, only 58% of registered people voted, and that was the largest voting turnout since 1968. In 2008, 68% of the people voted. Usually these high numbers are only for Presidential elections. In non-presidential elections the amount is significantly lower.

Recently, I went to Binghamton, NY for a deaf bowling tournament. There were over 100 people there and almost everyone of them said that they did not vote. When I asked why, a common answer was that “we have no power to change the system.” Another reason some told me was that they do not understand the issues reported on television and in newspapers. To them, trying to keep up with everything that is going on is boring and that their one vote will not make a difference.

At that tournament, I used a poster that contained visual information about some important moments in our history when people fought for their right to vote. Several deaf people became interested and registered on the spot. As a result, I got six first-time voters to register and three previously registered people who simply needed to change their addresses to update their information.

This experience at the bowling tournament made me think about how many deaf people actually vote. More people need to learn about the history of voting as well as what is happening in our government. In order to be informed, these people need access to information in the most appropriate language. They also need other people to discuss things that are happening, to create a dialogue about news, politics, and what is happening in the world around us. Maybe discussions amongst a few could be the start to convincing more deaf people that one vote *does* make a difference. See how my simple demonstration—using a poster full of visual information—caused nine people to change their mind so quickly.

While I am pleased that I was able to get through to nine individuals, I am left wondering about how to get the other people who were at the tournament as well. Hopefully we can show deaf people who are not registered that many under-represented groups have fought hard for the right to vote and that even today, there are people in other countries who are still fighting for this right. It is not something we should take for granted. We need to spread the word that voting is a great honor that we should take advantage of, in order to see change.

For more information on registering to vote, contact Dean DeRusso at [dderusso@rcil.org](mailto:dderusso@rcil.org).



497 State Street  
Rochester, New York 14608  
Phone (585) 442-6470 (V/TTY)  
Fax (585) 271-8558

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### Regional Center for Independent Living

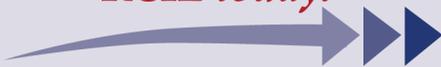
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