



# NYSILC NEWS BRIEFS

The New York State Independent Living Council (NYSILC) is a champion of systemic change promoting opportunities and full participation in all aspects of society for people with disabilities.

## NYSILC Outreach Subcommittee Seeks Connection with Veterans Services

By Joe Adler

It has been reported in the media that **one of every four homeless persons** in the United States **has served in the military**. All of us have seen them: Men and women on the street pushing shopping carts, searching outside containers for scraps of food and deposit bottles, lying on park benches or huddled against buildings, heated vents or pipes, or even camped out underground in subway tunnels or abandoned buildings. Some wait out the return of warmer weather in shelters, but many others avoid this option (where it exists) due to fear of victimization or a low tolerance for being around other people. It is easy to forget that in former days many of these women and men occupied positions of great responsibility in our Armed Services, displaying a high level of stress tolerance. They are double deserving of our assistance: Every person is entitled to safe lodging in a heated room/apartment/house, and we owe



Photo Courtesy of [www.media.nj.com/hudsoncountynow](http://www.media.nj.com/hudsoncountynow)

a special debt to those who enlisted in the military, regardless of country of service or combat experience.

How can NYSILC help? One way is by beginning to work in tandem with veterans groups and governmental officials to identify the types of help which are most needed. Toward this end and consistent with the 2008-2010 SPIL, NYSILC Council members and staff held two planning meetings this Fall, which were chaired by Council member and committee chair Ramon Rodriguez. At the first meeting in September, the subcommittee began to forge links with officials of the Veterans Administration at both the county and state levels. A veteran with a disability who presently volunteers at the Stratton VA Medical Center also participated in the discussion. Presentations on the history and philosophy of the Independent Living Movement

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

<b>1</b>	<b>NYSILC Outreach Subcommittee Seeks Connection with Veterans</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Dina</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>ILRU Reports on Youth Participation in Centers for Independent Living</b>



*Photo by Dan Lawton, Disaboom*

by Denise Figueroa, on NYAIL by Melanie Shaw and VESID by Bob Gumson, with input from ILC director Joe Bravo, highlighted the November meeting. At the discussion which followed, several appropriate areas of involvement for the ILCs were identified: Pre-vocational counseling with peer advocates appears to be a pressing need, since many of the younger veterans are presumed to have had little or no work experience as civilians. In addition, the returning veterans are thought to be in need of daytime community programming, which could greatly facilitate their social re-integration. By bolstering accessible transportation assistance, especially in rural areas, we can potentially provide services to more veterans (Many of the ILCs have their own vans, as do senior centers; yet gaps do exist.) The importance of reaching out to, and networking with, organizations who may not have been contacted until now was also recognized by all in attendance.

In sum, the committee is excited about the prospect of providing services to an increasing, underserved population. Please contact Joe at the NYSILC office (Our Toll Free number is 1 (888) 469 7452) if you would like to join the Veterans Outreach Committee. (Council membership is NOT required) ♦

## **Dina**

*By Ralph Giordano (Ralph is a NYSILC Council Member)*

Every fall we celebrate Disability Awareness and History month. As a person with a disability I'd like to contribute to the celebration with a few thoughts centered on a little story about a woman I have been chatting with online for some five or so years. Dina is 38 years old and a Native American living in the Seattle, Washington area. She has a developmental delay that manifests in physical stigmata, memory loss and mild emotional difficulty.

Presently, Dina lives alone in a subsidized apartment and receives disability insurance. She has recently worked at a local McDonald's and a Domino's Pizza but is currently unemployed. She explained that peer and boss disagreements led her to leave these positions. She also really enjoyed working at the local County Fair for the past two summers.

Unfortunately, Dina left both her jobs due to her inability to cope with peers or a boss on a consistent basis. She has a counselor who perhaps was not quite on top of these difficulties. This type of occurrence underscores the need for job coaches to continue to improve their skills, so that disagreements can be extinguished before they lead to job separation.

Through aptitude and practice, Dina has developed terrific computer skills for her educational level; she spells common words well, reads adequately but does not work well with numbers. She also is repetitive in communication at times. I have noticed that Dina has a pleasant speaking voice and sometimes sings to me a selection by her favorite rock group, Def Leppard, called "Make Love Like a Man." She also feels an attraction to the group's bass player, Rick Savage, and enjoys making unflattering comparisons between her musical idol and myself! Dina has also passed me by mercilessly in her use of Facebook.

This networking connection enhances her social life, although she is sensitive about her short and stout physical appearance and does not readily show her pictures. Actually, Dina is not alone in this; her sensitivity is common, especially among young people with disabilities in our era of super models and strapping athletes.

In viewing Dina's use of her computer, we have seen that technology improves the lives of people with disabilities by offering more activities on a daily basis. Other notable examples include the motorized wheelchair, the customized van, along with ramps and accessible venues of all sorts.

A solid physique has allowed Dina one amazing attribute: She is very strong! Dina has made the most of her physical prowess by becoming a champion Power Lifter in the Special Olympics, where she has won gold, silver and bronze medals at State and National Special Olympics. Dina will also compete next summer in Nebraska.

Surviving with a disability remains a challenge for Dina, as she experiences some difficulties, even while achieving great successes. I celebrate this month with Dina and everyone, knowing that while much remains undone, our country has made great advances since the 1950s, when I first learned to type on the prototype IBM electric typewriter ♦

## **ILRU Survey Results on Youth Participation in Centers for Independent Living**

*By Patty Black*

The Independent Living Research Utilization Program (ILRU) recently conducted a survey titled *Youth Participation in Centers for Independent Living* to collect information from CILs to help them more effectively plan training and technical assistance activities to include young people. This survey was created based on the needs expressed from many centers to enhance services and supports for youth and young adults with disabilities (ages 14-22). Due to their age, youth can often face more obstacles in their independent living goals and aspirations.

They can be excluded from policy-setting activities and goal-planning that would ultimately affect their lives. Therefore, ILRU conducted this survey in August 2009 and came up with the following summary based on 100 centers that provided responses.

Most respondents reported that their centers actively involved youth and young adults in a broad variety of ways. More than half stated that they had youth transition programs and worked closely with local youth organizations to plan and prepare various projects. Almost half reported that their center sponsored youth support groups and included youth participation in systems change advocacy, like visiting legislators. In response to the question on what services centers provided to help youth with disabilities, a large majority reported that they offered extensive independent living skill training (budgeting, self-advocating) and actively participated in the education/IEP process. Most centers also provided other services such as planning school transitions, support with assistive technology, and help with finding housing and employment.

More than half also reported that they work hand in hand with their local school district special education administrators in transition planning for students. Some of the ways centers with special education planning included having their staff provide support and advocacy, staying involved with the IEP process to ascertain that it encompasses all the vital educational needs for the success of students, teaching independent living skills to school systems, and working directly with the special administrators and their staff.

The ILRU survey also reports the approximate age range in which centers begin working with youth in the transition from school to life process. Most (more than half) reported they began the process at 14-15 years. Also, a great majority of the centers (72%) reported that they did not have an association or membership with their local or national youth organizations.

When ILRU asked the centers to rank a list of the training and technical assistance areas that would be most beneficial for them, their ranking listed as highest the need to design a leadership development process for youth with disabilities. The next priorities on the list in ranking of importance were the following:

- Service and program delivery to youth with disabilities
- Knowing how to operate an effective outcome-based school-to-work or higher education transition program
- Teaching youth with disabilities about systems advocacy
- Marketing programs and services to youth with disabilities
- Having youth with disabilities help design programs and services
- Involving youth with disabilities in managing and directing of a center; and,
- Understanding the role of vocational rehabilitation ♦

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**NYSILC  
Wishes  
Everyone a  
Very Happy  
and Safe  
Holiday  
Season!**