



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.

Volume 14 Issue 1

Fall 2010

Governor Signs Polling Place Access Bills Into Law

Governor Paterson signed the polling place access bill (A.10946/S.7860) into law on Sept. 18, which was sponsored by Assemblyman Kevin Cahill, D-Kingston and Sen. Joseph Addabbo, D-Queens.

There are several purposes of the new law that include the following: to provide for the accessibility of polling places, establish basic accessibility guidelines to ensure consistency, eliminate the outdated practice of granting waivers for inaccessible polling sites, and encourage substantial compliance at polling sites consistent with the accessibility guidelines set forth in the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The law also defines the circumstances related to surveying and documentation, especially when sites are moved or modified.

Federal and state funds are available to counties to make modifications of inaccessible polling sites. There is a



Photo courtesy of CIDNY 2009 Poll Site Accessibility Survey, www.cidny.org.

process in place whereby a county submits documentation to seek reimbursement for its costs from the NYS Board of Elections. If a site cannot be made easily accessible, it can be consolidated within a larger location (election district) that is accessible.

Governor Paterson also signed a complimentary bill (A.5707/S.5029) sponsored by Assemblywoman Helene Weinstein, D-Brooklyn and Sen. Addabbo on Aug. 13 to help increase the potential pool of accessible polling place locations. The bill requires owners of buildings who obtain tax abatement exemptions or other public benefits to make rooms available for voting and registration, which are accessible to people with disabilities.

On August 30, Gov. Paterson signed legislation (A.7850/S.8030) sponsored by Assemblywoman Amy Paulin, D-Scarsdale and Sen. Addabbo into law.

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The purpose of the bill is to provide that polling places, whenever practicable, shall be designated directly on a public transportation route.

These three new laws will help to facilitate access to polling places for people with disabilities♦

Transition Programs for Youth with Disabilities in Texas and New York

By Joe Adler

What was a NYSILC staffer doing in Dallas, Texas brainstorming with IL staff, transition counselors and educators at a conference on transition planning for high school students with disabilities? Actually, this was my third such trip in five years, with all expenses covered by a grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration to the University of Arkansas Region 6 Rehabilitation Continuing Education Center. I originally became involved with this project in 2006 by happenstance; Richard Farruggio, then serving as an IL NET Regional Coordinator, was unable to travel to Dallas for the first meeting of the “Think Tank” and I (as his supervisor) attended in his place. The initiative created by the successful grant proposal was dubbed Centers Hatching Initiatives for Realizing Potential, or (affectionately) CHIRP.

Our original assignment was to promote collaboration between Centers for Independent Living and the Texas Division of Assistive and Rehabilitation Services (DARS-the DSU). As a member of this “Think Tank” I have been privileged to participate in the creation of an innovative program and to watch it develop from the idea stage to implementation at ten school sites in Texas. While Texas has been the “incubator state” for this program, the curriculum, specific goals and achievements are being disseminated online in the hope that other states will adopt his model.

Some of the successful projects that grew out of this initiative include a summer youth employment program that has doubled in participation each year and a mobile transition unit comprising representatives of several community agencies that takes services to the schools. In 2008, the CHIRP project was given the RSA Commissioner’s Award for Excellence in Rehabilitation Education and Training.

At each meeting of the “Think Tank” there were detailed presentations and inter-active demonstrations of transition programs. At our final gathering in November 2010, two of the presenters were from New York State, Stephanie Orlando (Albany) and Christina Felix (Suffolk County). Both of these enthusiastic young women are leaders of the National Youth Leadership Network, which has developed a new transitional model: “Reap What You Sow: Harvesting Support Systems.” This curriculum, which was created by youth educators with disabilities, is designed for youth with disabilities, family members and allies. It teaches participants how to set goals, build a support network, and find community and power. The entire curriculum takes about 25 hours to complete. Facilitators interested in certification in the method need to complete the full training program. My experiences with CHIRP have taught me that with skilled mentoring and timely, realistic planning “everyone can reach their own greatness.” In our own state, VESID has run transitional programs for teenagers for a number of years, and has often been successful in placing these young people in state/local jobs and in the private sector. Unfortunately, budget cuts in the public sector have resulted in the elimination of several programs. Fortunately, there are still some funds earmarked for youth training in Independent Living settings. NYSILC has allocated funding in its State Plans for 2008-2010 and 2011-2013 to youth leadership development, with the goal of increasing youth involvement in Independent Living. Families Together in New York State and more recently AIM ILC in Corning were the recipients of grants for this purpose.

A successful statewide conference back in the Fall of 2006 for teenagers and young adults with disabilities underscored the importance of Youth Empowerment, as opposed to programming developed by staff. Subsequent outreach efforts via web development/social networking, connections established to national youth disability organizations, and monthly Young Adult night meetings/leadership workgroups in Corning have succeeded in establishing an informal state network. This network needs to be tightened and expanded in the coming years, even as the young leaders mentioned at the beginning of this article “age out♦”

Harlem ILC “Fresh Food Initiative” Provides Nutrition for Seniors and People with Disabilities

By Patty Black

Several Independent Living Centers have been active participants in a Community Organizing Grant. All of the ILC Community Organizing Teams have been focused on implementing their individual programs and assessing what was and was not working. The folks at the Harlem Independent Living Center have done some great work recently with the implementation of their Community Organizing Project for 2010, “The HILC Fresh Food Initiative,” which was created to improve access to fresh fruits and vegetables in the Harlem area for seniors and people with disabilities. Actually, this Project was chosen by HILC consumers out of a desire to have the fresh fruits and vegetables available at a reasonable price for the disabled seniors in the community. Over the past summer, the Project worked through the multiple extreme heat waves experienced in NYC. These heat waves sometimes actually barred constituents and consumers from fully participating, yet the determined group kept meeting as was regularly scheduled. Area churches and senior centers were part of the outreach and networking efforts of the Organizing Team.



Some of the vital information gathered during this time pertained to the availability of different models for providing the fresh fruits and vegetables within the community. In addition, initial contacts were made with local farmers.

This Project has now grown to a point where it has received funding from a neighborhood City Council Member. The committee has an acting chair, vice chair, and secretary. Due to the hard work of this group, several community gardens were located in both central and east Harlem. Also, the group will pay for consultants to advise them on the best crops to be planted and harvested, and the optimal time to do so. At this point, there are currently distribution points for seniors in the Harlem area of West 155th - West 116th Street. They have enlisted the support of teenage volunteers to bring the fruits and vegetables to those people who are not able to leave their homes. Finally, the seniors are charged a minimum price of \$1.00 per bag of goods and a maximum of \$3.00.

This project has taken off and established itself due to the hard work and dedication of the organizing team members. These consumers have responded admirably to a real need in their community♦

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