



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.

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The Middle Ages

By Brad Williams

After numerous requests, I finally relented and joined the ranks as a card-carrying AARP member. As I begin to learn what special privileges this membership affords me, including all the perplexities awaiting me on the verge of being a decade or so away from retirement (hey....I already get the senior citizen discount at Dunkin' Donuts by virtue of my graying hair) I was reminded of the importance of taking some time to discuss issues of importance with specific groups, like young adults with disabilities.

Seriously, it has been a very long time since I was a young adult. It seems almost a lifetime ago. However, I can remember myself struggling with career choices and the onset of a disability...pre-ADA and the existence of the Center for Independent Living (CIL) network. I recalled these thoughts while attending the Youth Power Annual Leaders Dinner in Albany.



Families Together NYS; 5th Annual YP Rally NYS Capitol

This event was part of their statewide conference. I was greeted at the door of the hotel and escorted to the elevator. Then I was introduced to several young adult advocates and led to the specific table in the conference room that they had selected for me. A group of six young adult advocates from across the state eventually joined me for dinner. I was impressed by the way they introduced themselves and shared background information. Soon they allowed me to do the same and more; I was encouraged to expand the discussion when necessary (taking a break for appetizers) until we were set up for the main course.

Even then, dinner would wait. I was their captive audience. They had me sufficiently engaged and it was now time to get down to the "meatier" issues. With the exception of one person at the table, employment was a real problem.

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I certainly had been aware of the lack of career opportunities and knew it was not easy for college graduates to obtain employment in their field. By relating their own experiences, they made me appreciate just how difficult the situation is for young adults with disabilities. This included a less than positive experience by one individual at his local Labor Department which lasted a total of 15 minutes. Despite being connected to the Navigator program, he ended up without any tangible employment opportunities and was never assisted with resume preparation. Our talk then shifted to something that several of them had experienced problems with – Disability Services Offices connected with colleges. One actually had a very positive experience. He was one year away from graduation and credited his success with the attitude of the people working in the office. A second person had an acceptable experience. The other individuals shared their stories of how these offices had basically let them down and not accommodated their needs. They explained that these colleges (all community colleges) seemed to have difficulty understanding how to accommodate students with cognitive or learning disabilities. Without the proper supports in place, they dropped out.

I was stunned. I had a cognitive disability as a college student, and by good fortune received the additional support I needed because of a professor who cared. Dinner was an afterthought. We got up and went through the buffet line, and finished our conversation at the table. I heard them loud and clear. It would be a matter of what could be or should be done about these issues.

Unfortunately, I had to leave in order to commute home. I thanked the group for their time and feedback on the issues.

As I made my way to the elevator, a person stopped me. He was sitting at the table next to us and had overheard some of our talk. This young man had a similar experience at his community college. He had requested a testing accommodation that college staff agreed to, but never put into place. Consequently, his grades had suffered and he was now on academic probation. I sat down and discussed the matter with him. At this point, he really needed third party intervention. I pulled out my business card and wrote down the name and number of the director of advocacy services for his local center.

What a disturbing trend! Just how pervasive is this problem? Is it isolated to the community colleges? What makes the difference between colleges that provide quality support services to students with disabilities and ones that drop the ball? Someone had to have more information on this topic. Did certain programs need to learn from best practices? Was there a need for legislation to rectify the situation, or did these individuals need to become plaintiffs? I left with far too many questions and very few answers

I know the next forum that I should attend...something on aging. I better get up to speed on the various issues crucial to senior citizens! It's really not that far away. I will probably be one of those pesky seniors with a walker that has a horn on the side (beep, beep). And I thought that I was going to be able to retire in the next decade? The battle over the protection of our rights, our services, our voice...any maybe even our own existence...is just beginning. 

The Top Ten Terrific Traits of People with Autism

By Lisa Joe Rudy

(Lisa is the author of *About.com*, an online newsletter)

If you're sick of hearing about all the "deficits" challenging people on the autism spectrum, join the club! But for every down side to autism, there seems to be a positive — an unusual trait that rarely appears among the "typical" community, but shines out among autistic folks. These plusses are well worth celebrating:

✚ **Autistic People Rarely Lie** – We all claim to value the truth, but almost all of us tell little white lies. All, that is, except people on the autism spectrum.

✚ **People on the Autism Spectrum Live in the Moment** – How often do typical people fail to notice what's in front of their eyes because they're distracted by social cues or random chitchat? People on the autism spectrum truly attend to the sensory input that surrounds them. Many have achieved the ideal of mindfulness.

✚ **People with Autism Rarely Judge Others** – Who's fatter? Richer? Smarter? For people on the autism spectrum, these distinctions hold much less importance than for typical folks. In fact, people on the spectrum often see through such surface appearances to discover the real person.

✚ **Autistic People are Passionate** – Of course, not all autistic people are alike. But many are truly passionate about the things, ideas and people in their lives. How many "typical" people can say the same?

✚ **People with Autism Are Not Tied to Social Expectations** – If you've ever bought a car, played a game or joined a club to fit in, you know how hard it is to be true to yourself. But for people with autism, social expectations can be honestly irrelevant. What matters is true liking, interest and passion – not "keeping up with the Joneses."

✚ **People with Autism Have Terrific Memories** – How often do typical people forget directions, or fail to take note of colors, names, and other details? People on the autism spectrum are often much more tuned in to details. They may have a much better memory than their typical peers for all kinds of critical details.

✚ **Autistic People Are Less Materialistic** - Of course, this is not universally true – but in general, people with autism are far less concerned with outward appearance than their typical peers. As a result, they worry less about brand names, hairstyles and other expensive but unimportant externals than most people do.

✚ **Autistic People Play Fewer Head Games** – Who was that woman, and why were you looking at her? I know I TOLD you I didn't mind if you went out, but why did you believe me? Most autistic people don't play games like these—and they assume that you won't either. It's a refreshing and wonderful change from the Peyton Place emotional roller coaster that mars too many typical relationships!

✚ **Autistic People Have Fewer Hidden Agendas** – Most of the time, if a person on the autism spectrum tells you what he wants – he is telling you what he wants. No need to beat around the bush, second guess, and hope you're reading between the lines!

And finally, **People with Autism Open New Doors for Neurotypicals** – For some of us neurotypicals, having an autistic person in our lives *has had a profound positive impact on our perceptions, beliefs and expectations.* For me, at least, being the mom of a son on the autism spectrum has released me from a lifetime of “should” –and offered me a new world of “is.” 

Irene: Ten Years After 9/11 and Six Years After Katrina
By Joe Adler

As we complete this issue, the initial reports regarding the lack of appropriate and accessible services provided to people with disabilities in the New York City metropolitan area during Hurricane Irene are very disturbing. To cite two examples, many of the shelters to which people were evacuated were not fully accessible to persons in wheelchairs, and persons who were deaf or hearing-impaired apparently had little or no access to vital information, despite continuous news coverage. These and other serious service gaps are being documented by disability advocates. Some stories are making their way into the media. A more comprehensive account will appear in an upcoming issue of **NewsBriefs**.

During the past decade there have been many meetings devoted to emergency planning in New York State. The disability community was represented, but generally at a basic and introductory level. Comprehensive recommendations to provide for the

needs of persons with disabilities were still “under consideration” by the State Office of Emergency Management and municipal officials when Hurricane Irene reached the nation’s largest metropolitan area. As our cities, towns and state begin to recover from this tragedy, we again pose the question: **How many more “fire bells in the night” will it take before there are fatalities directly attributable to this lack of services?** 



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