



**Needs Assessment Identifies Significant Issues for New Yorkers with Disabilities**

A statewide Needs Assessment conducted by NYSILC as a precursor to its State Plan formulation for 2014 to 2016 identified several significant issues for New Yorkers with disabilities. Brad Williams, Executive Director of NYSILC pointed out, "A background section of the reports asked the question, what does it mean to be a New Yorker with a disability? The data we found is bleak."

"The statistics confirm what we've known in the community for years," stated Denise Figueroa, Chair of NYSILC and Executive Director of the Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley. "We need a *call to action* if we are going to change the status of people with disabilities in this State." Some of the examples include:



- The employment rate for a New Yorker with a disability (ages 18-64) is 31.2% compared to 72% for a person without a disability resulting in a gap of 40.8 percentage points.
- Among civilians age 16 or older during the last 12 months, New Yorkers with disabilities earned \$10,903 less on average compared to a person without a disability (\$21,581 versus \$32,484)
- The poverty rate for New Yorkers with disabilities ages 18 to 64 living in the community is 28.6%, which is more than twice that of persons in our state without disabilities (12.3%).

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- When comparing Statewide Employment and Poverty Rates by Type of Disability between three disability types (physical, sensory, and mental health) a mental health disability has the most challenging results, demonstrating the lowest employment rate of 25.3% and the highest poverty rate of 35.7%!
- For students with disabilities ages 14-21 during the last 12 months, it was reported that they left New York State schools for the following reasons: 52% graduated with diplomas, 21% received certificates, 26% dropped out, and 1% aged out or died.

“Veterans with disabilities were recognized as the top underserved population,” commented Judith Avner, Executive Director of the Brain Injury Association of New York State (BIANYS) and former NYSILC member. “The background data identified 2320805 veterans with disabilities in New York State. The need for education and vocational services as well as other supports is acute so these wounded warriors can pursue productive lives.”

Alan Krieger of Krieger Solutions LLP, who helped facilitate the project, noted, “Based on a survey of almost 600 hundred New Yorkers with disabilities, the most challenging needs identifies were as follows:

- 1) Finances/Paying Bills**
- 2) Transportation**
- 3) Employment**

Krieger added, “When asked what services they needed most to live independently, they identified

transportation and advocacy, followed by medical/health services.”

The State’s institutionalized population was identified for planning purposes. The chart, sectioned by county and defined institutional locations, identified **220,277** New Yorkers with disabilities in these various settings. According to Williams, “This data was not available to the public. As a credible attempt to define this population, we submitted the chart as testimony during the Governor’s Olmstead hearings. Only the NYS Office of Mental Health maintains their data publically, online, with the information updated to indicate shifts in the population as people shift in and out of settings. This should be the standard to which all other State agencies are held. Otherwise, NYSILC had to FOIA the other State agencies in an aggressive effort to obtain the necessary data.”

Laurel Kelley, Executive Director of the Capital District Center for Independence, commented, “One project that we are looking to fund with our limited resources in the next State Plan is for capacity building projects to collaborate and help us better reach underserved populations.” She concluded, “If our network can identify a portion of its limited resources to address targeted populations and issues, then we REALLY would like to see the NYS legislature and governor make some of these needs a greater priority. The State IL contract hasn’t received an increase in several years. Additional funds could be utilized to expand the capacity building projects across the State to the underserved populations. State government should be working on ways to reduce the gaps acknowledged in employment, poverty and income for New Yorkers with disabilities.”

The 2012 NYSILC Statewide Needs Assessment Report is available at the following links:

[http://www.nysilc.org/primary\\_source/FINAL-2012-NYSILC-Needs-Assessment-Report-10-11-12.doc](http://www.nysilc.org/primary_source/FINAL-2012-NYSILC-Needs-Assessment-Report-10-11-12.doc)

[http://www.nysilc.org/primary\\_source/FINAL-2012-NYSILC-Needs-Assessment-Report-10-11-12.pdf](http://www.nysilc.org/primary_source/FINAL-2012-NYSILC-Needs-Assessment-Report-10-11-12.pdf)

### **Sensitivity toward the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

*Op-Ed Piece by the NYSILC Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee*

The disability community was initially pleased to see Mayor Bloomberg accompanied by Sign Language Interpreter Lydia Callas & Pamela Mitchell. Of course, what the public didn't know is that it took a lawsuit to achieve compliance with a federal law; the Americans with Disabilities Act. This accommodation was needed for the sake of public safety and to ensure that the City's residents who were Deaf and hard of hearing would have immediate access to vital emergency evacuation information. In an emergency situation, most networks do not provide what is called open or live captioning and it is commonly believed the individual person has control over their television sets and the captioning as well. American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters provide immediate communication for those who most need it. Mayors and Governors in other States have accepted this practice, which has been elusive in New York. At the same time the disability community noticed Ms. Callas and/or Ms. Mitchell, apparently many others did as well.

Aside from the numerous individuals who relied on their sign language skills, many in the general public took to making fun of the facial expressions/body movements which conveyed the Mayor's message to the audience.

Accepted mockery of one's culture gives approval to discrimination and tells the youth and less educated this behavior is fine. ASL is a visual-spatial language that is more than just the hangs signing. It calls for facial expressions and body movements that emphasize words and points within the context of the discussion, comparable to fluctuations in tone of voice or the use of exclamation points in sentences. Mocking the sign language interpreters simply indicates ignorance and immaturity.

So Saturday Night Live, are you going to do a racist joke next? Perhaps something that speaks poorly of women? No, you'd rather make fun of an interpreter and insult Deaf culture. It takes a very small mind to limit options and communication during an emergency.

The Deaf Dream website's rebuttal was simple, yet elegant: "we believe that our culture, history, community and language should be treated with respect...We stand by Lydia Callas and Ms. Mitchell and tell them both a job well done."



### **New Company, "AbleRoad" Launches!**

On January 24, 2013, Kevin G. McGuire introduced his new website and mobile app for easily finding and rating a wide variety of accessible venues – from restaurants, malls, hotels, medicals offices, and many other places. It is a wonderful mobile service for people with disabilities which can be accessed by using the iPhone and iPad apps, and an Android App will be released in February. The links to get started are: AbleRoad.com (<http://ableroad.com>) or Download the iPhone or iPad app via iTunes (<http://bit.ly/Wg7oGa>)