WORLD CELEBRATES
Day of Persons With Disabilities Recognized Globally

United Nations celebrated the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) Dec. 3. The theme of the 2015 commemoration of IDPD was “Inclusion matters: Access and empowerment for people of all abilities.”

The theme seeks to reduce inequalities and remove barriers to the equal participation in society and development for one billion people around the world who are people with disabilities. Sub-themes for IDPD 2015 were Making cities inclusive and accessible for all; Improving disability data and statistics; and Including persons with invisible disabilities in society and development.

IDPD has been commemorated since 1992 to promote awareness and mobilize support for critical issues relating to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in society and development. The estimated one billion people living with disabilities worldwide, continue to face many barriers to inclusion and do not have access to key aspects of society on an equal basis with others.

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World Celebrates Day of Persons with Disabilities

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UNDESA Organizes

The 2015 commemoration at the U.N. Headquarters was organized by U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) in close collaboration with governments, the U.N. system, development partners, civil society and in particular disabled people’s organizations (DPOs), as well as academic institutions. The U.N. Secretary-General, Permanent Representatives of Australia, Ecuador, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Spain as well as DPOs, academia and the private sector participated and presented several commemorative activities organized for the day.

Following the Opening Ceremony, panel discussions were organized under the sub-themes. The Day’s events at the U.N. Headquarters included a musical performance by artists with disabilities from Republic of Korea, the U.N. Enable Film Festival and, for the first time, the U.N. Enable Photo Exhibition. The film festival was opened by Commissioner Victor Calise of the New York City Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities.

Around the world, governments, U.N. offices, civil society organizations, including persons with disabilities and their organizations conducted activities and events to celebrate the Day. The U.N. Office in Geneva celebrated IDPD by announcing “A Day for All”, where a group of U.N. agencies, international organizations, independent experts and civil society organizations hosted a series of activities to acknowledge the achievements and contributions of people with disabilities, as well as to reaffirm their commitment to the rights of people with disabilities.

Activities included an unveiling of an artistic intervention to the ‘broken chair’ monument, at the Place des Nations and a roundtable with Spanish actor and writer Pablo Pineda in Room XX at the Palais des Nations. U.N. Women notes that to ensure the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, in addition to gender-related information, disability-related information must be collected in surveys and at the analysis stage and that indicators must systematically be disaggregated and reported by sex and disability.

President Commemorates

Pres. Barack Obama said in a proclamation commemorating the day, “The United States has long been a leading voice for the rights of persons with disabilities, and we join the international community in expressing our support for them in all they do and in recognizing them as the valuable members of society that they are.

“Today, as we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – landmark legislation that helps ensure the places that make up our shared national life truly belong to everyone – we also recognize that protecting the rights of those with disabilities is not just an American ideal, but a cornerstone of our work to ensure human rights around the globe. On International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we re dedicate ourselves to building a fairer and more accessible world and to upholding the fundamental dignity and respect of all people.

The United States International Council on Disabilities (USICD) staff, board and members joined the global disability community in celebrating the annual International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

USICD Members and Friends Celebrate

“USICD shares a vision with the work disability community for creating a society that recognizes the importance of enabling every global citizen to participate in public life,” said a spokesperson for the organization.

USICD celebrated the day with their annual Gala, hosted in partnership with Embassy of Finland in Washington, D.C.
Mental Health Report Details States’ Legislation

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) recently released its third annual survey of state mental health care legislation. The 2015 report was created shortly before the third anniversary of the Newtown school shooting tragedy, which raised public demand for mental health care reform.

The report shows that only 23 states were willing to increase mental health spending in 2015, compared to 36 states in 2013, and 29 in 2014. For the second year in a row, Minnesota and Virginia stand out as leaders for reform. New York also invested significantly in 2015 to strengthen its public mental health system.

The District of Columbia increased funding in 2013 and 2014, but decreased it in 2015. Illinois and Pennsylvania still have not passed their overall budgets. Arizona, Minnesota, Utah, Virginia and Washington state passed the five top bills of the year, providing priority models for other states.

“The good news is that efforts to improve the lives of people affected by mental illness have continued in 2015,” said NAMI Executive Director Mary Giliberti. “Some states have enacted specific reforms that can serve as models for others. And Congress has slowly begun to move forward now with mental health reform legislation. The bad news is that fewer states are strengthening investment in mental health care and Congress has only recently started to act after having been largely absent for two years. Increased focus by Congress will be needed to get final, comprehensive legislation.”

Only 11 states have increased their investment in mental health care every year from 2013 to 2015. Those states are Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, South Carolina, South Dakota, Virginia and Washington. Alaska, North Carolina and Wyoming cut their investment every year during that period. After two years of increases, cuts occurred during the 2015 legislative sessions in Arizona, Iowa, Kansas and Ohio.

The report’s budget section covers basic trends of increase, maintenance or decrease. Actual dollar amounts, ratios or comparisons are not available because of the difficulty in collecting data across all states. Each state’s budget status is based on information from the websites of state mental health agencies, news media reports and reports from NAMI advocates.

New Law Allows Parents as Paid Caregivers

Beginning in April, the Social Services law will be amended in New York state, allowing parents of an adult child with a disability to be paid under the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP), as long as the parent is not also named as the designated representative.

The CDPAP is a statewide Medicaid program that provides an alternative way of receiving home care services, where the consumer has more control over who provides their care and how it is provided. It also allows for them to hire anyone they choose. Rather than assigning a home care vendor or agency that controls selection, training and scheduling of aides, the consumer, the family member, friend or guardian directing their care performs all these functions usually done by a vendor.

The change, recently signed into law by Gov. Andrew Cuomo, amends a Social Services Law and enacts Senate bill S05712-A. Currently, state regulations prohibit only the spouse or parent from being hired as the CDPAP aide, but allow a son or daughter or any other family member, provided the family member does not reside with the consumer, or if they do reside with the consumer because the amount of care the consumer requires makes such relative's presence necessary.

The aide need not be certified, as training is done by the consumer and family. However, CDPAP aides may perform skilled care that otherwise only be performed when a person cannot self-administer, such as suctioning tracheotomies, insulin injections, administration of oxygen and medications.

Many parents of children who are developmentally disabled are stressed to their maximum abilities when they have a child who requires constant care. If there are two parents in the home, they often work opposite hours of each other, so one of them is always available to care for the child.

This is typically done instead of using a residential setting such as a group home, because they want their child home with them for as long as possible. While the parents are very willing to do so, many find that by the time their child has reached the age of 21 years old and no longer in a school setting, they are the full-time caregivers for their now adult children.

Many families find the financial stress increases over time to the point where they find themselves bankrupt and on assistance programs. Although many parents need to work to support their families, they often reduce their hours or stay home unpaid to care for their child.

Since 2011, the solution for several states has been to pay the parents. However, the Home Continued on page 15

Carolyn McCarthy Honored


More than 200 friends and supporters came to celebrate their accomplishments and watch them accept the John Walter Humanitarian Award, established in 2002 to honor individuals who are dedicated to humanitarian efforts and the CMA. Following a sit-down dinner, there was a call to action to support the renovation of the first floor in one of CMA’s group homes. Pledges immediately poured in from event attendees, and the event raised more than $115,000.

CMA provides residential, case management and vocational services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The organization owns and operates 12 residences in communities throughout Long Island.

“Too much of the public dialogue about mental health over the past three years has been framed relative to violence,” Giliberti said. “The Newtown tragedy and other events undoubtedly have helped to fuel public demand for mental health care reform. At the same time, studies clearly show that the vast majority of individuals living with mental illness are not violent. Tragedies are happening every day. They include people living with mental illness who end up in emergency rooms, jails, living homeless on the street. They include young people whose symptoms aren’t recognized early enough to avoid the worst outcomes. They include deaths by suicide.”

In the report, gold stars identify states that NAMI considers especially notable and that Continued on page 15
Advocates Call for Greater Caregiver Oversight

Emotional, physical and financial abuse of the elderly by family members and other guardians is a chronic problem in the United States. The capability and trustworthiness of guardians to act in the best interest of their wards is at issue. A ward is an individual who is deemed incompetent or incapacitated to the extent that they cannot make decisions or effectively communicate them to others on their own behalf. In those cases, guardianship is turned over to family members or outside parties. As a result, advocates of the elderly and disabled are calling for states to increase court oversight and regulation of guardians.

Additionally, it is the issue of rights of children to have visitation of their infirmed or elderly parent, even when the parent's guardian does not want to allow it. In many cases this involves the guardian being another parent or step-parent with whom the children are estranged. In such cases, The Catherine Falk Organization advocates for children's visitation rights. They are pushing to pass the Peter Falk Bill, which was initiated by Catherine Falk when her step-mother would not allow her to visit her father when he became incapacitated. Famed actor Peter Falk had dementia in the last years of his life, and Catherine's step-mother's refusal to allow her to visit him prompted a contentious court battle, and later, this legislation.

Similar cases of denied visitation to children by step-parents include Casey Kasem, Mickey Rooney and Glenn Campbell. However, hundreds of other similar cases may exist concerning everyday people. “Many states are in the process of establishing the office of the public guardian and working to set minimum education and experience standards for professionals acting as guardians.”

Standards also encourage courts to appoint a guardian with the least potential for a conflict of interest. “Guardians are required and expected to act in a manner that is honest and responsible, with good faith and in the best interest of the ward,” she said. “The meaning of these words and terms varies according to the ethics and morals of the individual appointed guardian. Some family guardians see no issue with taking a ward's funds and purchasing vehicles or sporting equipment for private use even though these funds might be beneficially spent on in-home care. Professional guardians fall into similar traps.”

With Americans living longer and elder abuse cases rising, guardianship cases are growing over the years. In cases where there are no qualified or willing family members or friends to serve as guardian, a professional guardian will be needed, although the ward's estate may not have the funds to do so. In these cases, Adult Protective Services may be appointed guardian.

However, even when a family member or friend is willing and has good intentions, the task of being guardian to a sick or frail individual can be overwhelming without proper support or training. In such cases, it is advised that the guardian seek out the help of a professional caregiver. Pamela Wilson, MS, BS/BA, CG, CSA, specializes in working with family and professional caregivers to navigate health-care and aging concerns. Through her company, The Care Navigator, she is an advocate and service provider in the roles of guardian, power of attorney, care manager and transition specialist.
**Nassau Agrees to Audible Devices at Intersections**

Nassau County has agreed to a settlement in a lawsuit to require the enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 with the installation of accessible pedestrian signals (APS) at intersections on public streets in the County.

The suit brought by Plaintiffs Lori Scharff, Michael Godino and Edward Molloy, who are all individuals who are blind, visually impaired or deaf-blind, and the Long Island Council of the Blind (LICB) alleged failure to provide for Plaintiff's use and enjoyment of streets throughout Nassau County.

The County denied the factual basis of Plaintiffs' claims and specifically argued that APS was not a public program, activity, service or facility covered by Title II of the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act. Defendants also argued that the lack of specific United States Department of Justice regulations governing the design and construction of newly constructed or altered pedestrian facilities in public rights of way invalidated any obligation under Title II of the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act to install APS.

At a settlement conference before Judge Gary Brown in November the parties agreed to resolve all issues before the Court through a negotiated agreement.

The settlement states that Nassau County Department of Public Works (DPW) is responsible for the installation and maintenance of pedestrian traffic signals along roadways owned or controlled by Nassau County in the ordinary course of alteration of traffic signals and is to install APS when reconstructing or newly constructing traffic signals.

The County will install APS so that people who are blind, visually impaired or deaf-blind can receive aural and vibrotactile information equivalent to visual pedestrian signal (VPS) information. APS technology such as the Polara Navigator technology or equivalent technologies that provide VPS information via aural and vibro-tactile communication in English are required and the County will develop an APS Accessibility Plan for VPS owned by Nassau County.

The decree requires Nassau County to pay $10,000 to each of the individual Plaintiffs Scharff, Godino and Molloy, respectively and $25,000 to the Long Island Council of the Blind.

Shila Shah-Gavoudias was defendant in the case as the Commissioner of the Nassau County Department of Public Works. Plaintiffs were represented by attorneys Robert Briglio and Martin Coleman and the Deputy County Attorney Ralph Reissman represented the County.
Happy New Year! As Chair of the Assembly Task Force on People with Disabilities, I use this column to keep Able readers as up to date as possible on the priorities we are focused on. In my November column, I discussed two events which addressed some of the pressing concerns in the community – a roundtable on ridesharing companies and a public hearing on traumatic brain injury treatment and services that the Task Force co-sponsored last fall.

Shortly after those events were held, the Task Force also co-sponsored two public hearings on the status of the State Office for the Aging’s Office of Community Living study – one in New York City on Oct. 20th and one in Albany on Oct. 27. Much was discussed at these hearings, and a few things were made abundantly clear. First of all, it was apparent that many disability advocates feel that it is very unfair that there is no statewide entity responsible for overseeing the rights and needs of people with disabilities – especially those with physical disabilities. It was also evident that many representatives of the aging and elderly community do not associate themselves or their constituents with the disability community despite the similar concerns shared by both groups.

Although the Task Force supports the creation of an Office of Community Living, it remains to be seen as to what will happen based on the study conducted to seek “public input about the creation of an Office of Community Living with the goal of providing improvements in service delivery and improved program outcomes that would result from the expansion of community living integration services for older adults and persons of all ages with disabilities.” Still, there is momentum building to establish a statewide entity to protect the rights and needs of people with disabilities – especially those with physical disabilities.

This issue has long been a concern of ours – ever since the Office of Advocate was done away with years ago. The Task Force resisted the closing of that office and has long felt that people with disabilities are not represented well at the state-agency level.

The Task Force is looking forward to exploring a solution for this and addressing this need as we move into 2016. As a member of the community, we would appreciate any input you would like to give on this issue as we usually look to our advocates for guidance. When we initiate new legislation or public policy, we firmly believe in the premise of “nothing about us without us.”

So, as always, if you have any comment, questions or concerns, please contact my Task Force office at 518 455-4592. Thank you.
Ms. Wheelchair N.Y. – Champion for Service Dogs

By Allison Howe

Long Islander Emily Sciarretta was recently crowned Ms. Wheelchair New York USA 2016.

Her platform is to educate the public and business owners about service dogs and how they improve and enrich the lives of their owners. She plans to spend her one-year reign speaking at various venues about the need for more service dog acceptance including allowing certified service dogs to be welcome at all public places, as mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Sciarretta uses a wheelchair due to several conditions, but with the help of her dog Carmel, she is able to retain much of her independence. The two of them graduated from Canine Companions for Independence five years ago.

At the program, Carmel learned 44 commands and has since learned another 20 from Sciarretta. One of them is Carmel’s ability to retrieve items that are out of reach, with the help of a laser pointer.

“Have come across plenty of dogs that are unruly and have lunged towards my service dog,” she said. “The establishments should be given more authority to ask a team to leave if the dog is acting unruly or is acting inappropriately.”

According to Sciarretta, every team who graduates an accredited program should receive an identification card. This, along with a legitimate dog vest, will help business owners easily identify genuine teams. Any team that does not have both should be denied access.

“This would also crack down on the fake service dog vests that are being sold online,” she said. “If there’s one uniform vest, people will recognize them and realize a fake when they see it.”

Vets Praise BOCES Students

Marine veterans Michael Quinn, left, and Dennis Morrilli, recently presented Josiah D., a student of the William Floyd School District with a character education certificate.

He was one of 16 students of special education who received certificates at a Character Education Day event organized by social workers at the Eastern Suffolk BOCES Westhampton Beach Learning Center. Retired military personnel from the U.S. Navy, Air Force, Marines and Army were invited to present them.

After the assembly, the students visited the local American Legion Hall located in Eastport. Students selected to receive the certificates consistently portrayed good citizenship and caring for those around them.
In nineteen years the Taxis For All Campaign (TFAC) began advocating for access to New York City’s taxis. There were fits and starts and successes and failures but, four years ago, TFAC, United Spinal and a host of others in the disability community enjoyed a Christmas Season filled with hope for future taxi access.

The community had sued the New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) successfully, the U.S. Attorney’s office filed a Statement of Interest with the court in support, and Judge Daniels held that the TLC is required to provide meaningful access to New York City’s yellow cab system. Only a few days before that decision, Gov. Andrew Cuomo forced reticent New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Taxi Commissioner David Yassky to release 2,000 new medallions for sale which could only be placed on accessible taxis.

The fleet would increase from 13,200 to 15,200 and expand the accessible fleet to 2,230. Additionally, green “boro taxis” with street hail privileges in the outer boroughs would be at least 20 percent accessible.

The holiday season two years ago was even more joyous as it relates to yellow cab access. After 12 years of opposition to accessible taxis, Mayor Bloomberg ended the litigation by agreeing to make half of New York City’s yellow fleet accessible by 2020. What a victory! What a celebration!

Fast forward two years – 30,000 Uber cabs, 100 percent of which are inaccessible, have flooded New York City. An enormous number of riders have migrated from yellows to Ubers and so have drivers. Medallion owners have seen their net worth drop from $1 million per medallion two years ago to $650,000 a year ago and no medallions have been auctioned since.

Some medallion owners have filed for bankruptcy. Only 350 of the 2,000 accessible medallions were actually sold and there are no plans to sell the other 1,650 because there is no market for them. Even borough taxi permits are not selling.

Fleet owners, for the first time, are experiencing shrinking in their industry. Yellow cabs are garaged on the lot because fleet owners cannot find enough drivers. When drivers show up for their shift they take out hybrids first, any car but an accessible one second and accessible vehicles third.

Meanwhile, as Uber takes Manhattan, Albany legislators are putting together legislation, at Uber’s request, with apparent support from Gov. Cuomo, which would expand Uber statewide and allow them to remain inaccessible.

The bill, ostensibly intended to create an insurance product for Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) like Lyft and Uber (if the driver is on the app, it’s a commercial vehicle; if the driver is off the app, it’s a personal car and insured as such) also precludes local regulation. While the mayors of Albany, Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo have expressed support for bringing Uber services to their community, the bill precludes their regulating it.

It applies to other communities in New York state, except New York City, meaning that Westchester and Nassau counties cannot
The Challenger Division prepares to start the race at the 38th Annual Garden City Turkey Trot.

The Kenney Family Foundation assisted by Al Vanasco, ensures that the athletes in the Challenger Division experience the thrill of victory each and every year.

This year’s race was the largest ever with more than 6,600 runners from all over Long Island and beyond. Race Dir. Ken Aneser noted the race has tripled in size the last few years and would not be possible without the incredible support from corporate sponsors and hundreds of volunteers.

The Turkey Trot consists of three races - a Challenger Division Race for athletes with disabilities, a 1.4 mile Fun Run and a 5 Mile Race. Net race proceeds are donated to the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, the Muscular Dystrophy Association and the INN.

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Able-Ride is Proudly Serving Nassau County

Providing quality transportation for the disabled community.

To apply for service or to find out more information, please call 516.228.4000 or visit us at www.nicebus.com

Able-Ride is a service of NICE, which is owned by Nassau County and operated by Veolia Transportation
Molloy College Women’s Basketball teammates participated, recently in the Athletes for Alzheimer’s – Give from the Heart Endurance Event held in the school’s athletic center in support of the Alzheimer’s Disease Resource Center (ADRC).

Several gymnasiums across Nassau County held similar events in support of the Center (ADRC). The event at Molloy College was particularly special because event organizer, Marijane Camilleri, attended to present Molloy student Lauren Williams with the Purple Push Up Award for Best Female Athlete in recognition of her excellence in athleticism at the college. Camilleri is the daughter of Dorothy C. Camilleri, in whose memory the series is held.

Athletes for Alzheimer’s – Give from the Heart Endurance support ADRC’s mission to provide funds and resources for local research that may lead to a cure for Alzheimer’s disease and to provide educational programs and support for Long Island families in need.

For resources and information visit www.adrcinc.org.

Charlotte Chosen Site for Paralympic Trials

U.S. Paralympics recently announced that they selected the city of Charlotte, N.C., as the site of the 2016 U.S. Paralympic Team trials for cycling, swimming, and track and field.

For the first time in U.S. Paralympics’ history, the trials will feature three sports being contested concurrently, all within the city of Charlotte, which will be held June 30 to July 2. Charlotte was selected based on a number of criteria, including its sport venues, local accommodations, accessibility and transportation, among several other factors.

“We expect this event to be one of the best Paralympic Trials we’ve had to date, and to feature some of the top talent in U.S. Paralympic sport,” said Rick Adams, chief of Paralympic sport. “Charlotte presents the perfect opportunity to shine a light on Paralympic sport and to set the stage for some outstanding performances and incredible success for Team USA in advance of Rio.

We thank Partners for Parks for its commitment to hosting a great event, and we thank the people of Charlotte for their support of America’s Paralympic athletes.”

Set to be the largest Paralympic trials in U.S. history, it will host more than 400 athletes competing for a chance to advance to the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games as a member of Team USA. Following three days of competition, the event will culminate with a celebration, during which the U.S. team rosters for all three sports will be announced for the games, which will include approximately 4,500 athletes with physical disabilities from more than 165 countries.

Tickets on Sale for Rio 2016 Paralympic Games

U.S. Paralympics, a division of the United States Olympic Committee, and CoSport have announced that individual tickets and packages for the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games are now available exclusively through cosport.com. CoSport has been appointed the International Paralympic Committee’s Global Authorized Ticket Reseller for the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games. On Sept. 7, the world will come together in Rio de Janeiro for the Opening Ceremony, followed by 11 days of competition in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It is anticipated that Team USA will send its largest delegation to date. In order to secure Individual Tickets, U.S. residents are invited to first create a cosport.com account. Individual tickets are currently being sold via live sales. Hotel and Ticket Packages including access to some of the most sought after events are currently available for sale. “For our athletes and fans alike, there are few experiences more exhilarating than being part of competing on the world stage,” said Rick Adams, USOC Chief of Paralympic Sport and NGB organizational development.

For the latest news on Team USA, visit USParalympics.org. For information visit cosp ort.com.

Winter Sports Camps Planned In Vermont and Colorado

The United States Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) has teamed up with Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center and Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sport to offer two opportunities for individuals who want to enjoy skiing and snowboarding this winter.

In Colorado, March 2 to 6, they will host a camp where people can learn to ski or snowboard, or work on advancing the skills they already have. In Vermont, Feb. 5 to 8, they will host the annual winter sports festival.

Both camps are open to all skill levels and ages. To register visit usaba.org/index.php/sports/calendar/P6/.

Athletes Raise Money for Alzheimer’s Center

For information visit cosp ort.com.

Athletes for Alzheimer’s – Give from the Heart Endurance Events support ADRC’s mission to provide funds and resources for local research that may lead to a cure for Alzheimer’s disease and to provide educational programs and support for Long Island families in need.

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NCD EXAMINES MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN HIGHER ED.

The National Council on Disability (NCD) seeks proposals for a report examining mental health services in institutions of higher education.

The findings will serve to assist policymakers, including the White House and Congress, with insight needed to make policy decisions designed to improve outcomes for students with mental health disabilities.

The report also provides students with mental health disabilities and those who support them, with an understanding of policy, legislation and initiatives that impact their lives.

The research will examine policy and physical barriers preventing students from accessing services and gaps and weaknesses in existing services that discriminate under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

The report will also identify promising practices and emerging trends in mental health.

NCD expects interested parties to submit responses by Jan. 15. Copies of the Notice of Funding Opportunity will be available on www.grants.gov.

For information contact Ana Torres-Davis, 202-272-2019 or 202-272-2074 TTY.

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE TO PAY HEATING BILLS

New Yorkers who are elderly or have low income may be eligible for assistance paying their heating bills through the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP).

The New York state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance oversees the program.

Households can receive a one-time benefit of up to $625 this winter depending upon income, household size and heating source.

To apply visit otda.ny.gov/programs/heap.

PROPOSALS SOUGHT FOR MENTAL HEALTH REPORT

The National Council on Disability (NCD) is accepting proposals for a report to examine student mental health services in institutions of higher education.

The report will provide an assessment of existing student mental health services and policies, as well as recommendations for improvements.

The maximum amount available for this project is $115,000.

Proposal deadline is Jan. 15.

For details visit go.usa.gov/cB3VV.

GAMER'S CLUB A FUN AND SAFE PLACE TO SOCIALIZE

Social Game Club for teens and young adults with and without disabilities who are seeking friendships and a fun place to socialize is an ideal environment for those who are shy, have few or no friends, social anxiety or difficulty with social skills.

Participants meet others and have fun socializing and playing video games, board games, RPG’s, Pokemon, Anime, Minecraft and more.

Members may register for Special Event Days such as Friday Night Pizza Socials, Super Smash Bros Competitions, Assessment Night, 516-571-1500, to obtain memberships.

Member trips are offered for four- and eight-weeks.

A free no-obligation trial visit is offered.

Limited openings available in the Girls Club - ages 14-18; Boys Club - ages 16-19 and a new club now forming - Twenties + Club - ages 20 and up.

For information, call Annie, 631 605-1813.

JAN. 4 IS DEADLINE TO FILE FOR TAX REDUCTIONS

The tax exemption application period ends on Jan. 4. Homeowners wishing to receive exemptions on their 2016-2017 School taxes and 2017 General taxes must file with the Nassau County Department of Assessment before the deadline.

A tax reduction program for home improvements made by those with physical disabilities is granted to those people who have physical disabilities and meet the criteria.

It is equal to the amount of any increase in value of property attributable to improvements made for the purpose of facilitating and accommodating the use and accessibility of the property.

There is also a partial exemption for people with disabilities and limited income. It is available to eligible applicants who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits their ability to engage in one or more major life activities and meet the income requirements.

Stefanich advises homeowners who are interested in obtaining an exemption, to contact the Nassau County Department of Assessment, 516-571-1500, to obtain additional information and applications.

For brochures describing the STAR, Senior Citizen or Veterans call 516 624-6380.

ABLE ACCEPTS EVENT AND PROGRAM INFORMATION

Able Newspaper will print event and program information from agencies when space permits.

Send items to ablenews@aol.com.

FILM LOOKS AT ROMANCE FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

“Autism in Love” offers a look at four people as they pursue and manage romantic relationships. It will premiere on the PBS series Independent Lens Monday, Jan. 11 at 10 p.m. ET.

Among the people profiled in the film are thirty-something Washingtonians Dave and Lindsey, who have been together for eight years. Both high functioning and employed, they met at a conference on autism and, through the years, have learned to cope with each other’s quirks and different ways of communicating. Lindsey and Dave are now contemplating marriage.

“In recent years the rate of autism spectrum disorder diagnosis has increased at an alarming rate and yet the causes are still unknown,” said filmmaker Matt Fuller.

“Regardless of the disorder’s origin, what is seldom heard are stories about what happens once these kids who have been diagnosed grow up.

What happens when children with autism become adults and want to have lives of their own?”

WORKSHOPS AVAILABLE FOR PROVIDERS AND CAREGIVERS

Gary Shulman provides special needs workshops for staffs, parents, family members and caregivers on topics such as “The Stress of Caring for a Child with a Disability;” “Needs, Wants, Wishes and Dreams: Programs and Services that Bring Relief to Parents of Children with Disabilities;” and “Communicating with Parents.”

Shulman was the program director of social services, training coordinator and Special Camp Fair coordinator for Resources for Children with Special Needs, Inc. for more than 24 years.

For information contact Shulman, 646 596-5642 visit his website, http://garyshulman.jimdo.com.

GUIDE HELPS PARENTS NAVIGATE PUBERTY

Autism Speaks recently announced the creation of a puberty resource guide for parents with adolescents with autism.

Topics include body changes, self-care and hygiene, public versus private rules, stranger danger, elopement and internet safety.

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

**JANUARY 4**

**VIPS (Visually Impaired Persons of Suffolk)** 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Port Jefferson Village Center, 101-A East Broadway, Port Jefferson. For information call 631 892-2160. Also Jan. 11, 18 & 25.

**Cancer Support Group** 2 to 4 p.m. at Franklin Hospital, 900 Franklin Ave., Valley Stream. For information call 516 256-6478.

**Family Comes First Television Series** at 10:30 p.m. on Telecare. For information call Vincent J. Russo 516 683-1717. Also Jan. 11, 18 & 25.

**Suicide Attempt Survivors Support Group** sponsored by Queens/Long Island Counseling Services of the Foundation for Religion and Mental Health 7:30 to 8:45 p.m. at the Oceanside Lutheran Parish Hall, 55 Fairview Ave., Oceanside. For information call 516 547-4318. Also Jan. 18.

**Sky Zone Caress** 1 to 5:30 p.m. indoor trampoline park located at 111 Rodeo Drive, Deer Park is open for those with special needs. For information call 631 392-2600.

**January 5**

**Teen Zone Fitness, Socialization, Dancing, Games and more** 4:45 to 6 p.m. at HOPEFitness Nassau, 2750 North Jerusalem Rd., North Bellmore. For information call 877 396-4673. Also Jan. 12, 19 & 26.

**Caregiver Support Group** for caregivers of patients with chronic and/or serious illnesses 4 to 5 p.m. at South Nassau Communities Hospital Conference Room B or C. For information call 516 692-4219. Also Jan. 12, 19 & 26.

**January 6**

**Yoga for Special Needs** 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Franklin Hospital, 900 Franklin Ave., Valley Stream. For information call 516 547-4318. Also Jan. 13, 20 & 27.

**January 11**

**Bipolar Support Group** sponsored by Queens/Long Island Counseling Services of the Foundation for Religion and Mental Health 7:30 to 8:45 p.m. at the Oceanside Lutheran Parish Hall, 55 Fairview Ave., Oceanside. For information call 516 547-4318. Also Jan. 18.

**Autism in Love** directed by Matt Fuller offers a look into the lives of four people with autism and premiers on PBS series Independent Lens, 10 p.m. ET.

**January 16**

**Long Island Council of the Blind** 12:30 to 4 p.m. at the Elsworth Allen Town Park Community Room, 45 Motor Ave., S. Farmingdale. For information call Ed 516 385-8756.

**January 19**

**Multiple Sclerosis Support Group** 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at St. Frances de Chantal Church, 1309 Wantagh Ave., Wantagh. For information call 516 945-4526.

**February 1**

**VIPS (Visually Impaired Persons of Suffolk)** Mondays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Port Jefferson Village Center, 101-A East Broadway, Port Jefferson. For information call 631 830-2160. Also Feb. 8, 15, 22 & 29.

**Cancer Support Group** first Mondays 2 to 4 p.m. at Franklin Hospital, 900 Franklin Ave., Valley Stream. For information call 516 547-4675.

**Family Comes First Television Series** Mondays at 10:30 p.m. on Telecare. For information call Vincent J. Russo 516 683-1717. Also Feb. 8, 15, 22 & 29.

**Suicide Attempt Survivors Support Group** sponsored by Queens/Long Island Counseling Services of the Foundation for Religion and Mental Health Alternate Mondays 7:30 to 8:45 p.m. at the Oceanside Lutheran Parish Hall, 55 Fairview Ave., Oceanside. For information call 516 547-4318. Also Feb. 15 & 29.

**February 2**

**Teen Zone Fitness, Socialization, Dancing, Games and more** 4:45 to 6 p.m. Tuesdays at HOPEFitness Nassau, 2750 North Jerusalem Rd., North Bellmore. For information call 877 396-4673. Also Feb. 9, 16 & 23.

**Caregiver Support Group** Tuesdays for caregivers of patients with chronic and/or serious illnesses 4 to 5 p.m. at South Nassau Communities Hospital Conference Room B or C. For information call 516 632-4219. Also Jan. 12, 19 & 26.

**February 3**

**Yoga for Special Needs** 5 to 6 p.m. at HOPEFitness Nassau, 2750 North Jerusalem Rd., North Bellmore. For information call 877 396-4673. Also Jan. 12, 19 & 26.

**January 13, 20 & 27.**

**January 22 & 29.**

**February 8**

**Bipolar Support Group** sponsored by Queens/Long Island Counseling Services of the Foundation for Religion and Mental Health Alternate Mondays 7:30 to 8:45 p.m. at the Oceanside Lutheran Parish Hall, 55 Fairview Ave., Oceanside. For information call 516 547-4318. Also Feb. 10, 17 & 24.

**February 20**

**Long Island Council of the Blind** third Saturdays 12:30 to 4 p.m. at the Elsworth Allen Town Park Community Room, 45 Motor Ave., S. Farmingdale. For information call Ed 516 385-8756.

**February 23**

**Multiple Sclerosis Support Group** 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at St. Frances de Chantal Church, 1309 Wantagh Ave., Wantagh. For information call 516 945-4526.

Lupus Alliance of Long Island/Queens Support Group once a month on Tuesdays 7:30 to 9 p.m. in Smithtown and East Meadow. For information call 516 802-3142.

**Veterans Outreach Program** sponsored by Northport VA Medical Center at locations in Riverhead, Northport, East Meadow, Patchogue, Valley Stream and Bay Shore. For information call Debbie 631 261-4400 ext. 7084.

**Special Needs Sports Program** for ages 4 and up 12 to 2 p.m. every other Saturday through June at the William Floyd Middle School, 630 Moriches Middle Island Rd., Moriches Athletic Complex, Moriches. For information call Debbie Metz 631 767-4354.

To have your event or meeting listed, send information to www.ablenews@aol.com. The deadline for calendar items is the 10th day of the month preceding the date of publication. Calendar items will be accepted only if they have a specific date.
A researcher from Birmingham, U.K., is exploring ways to enhance the experience musicians who are deaf using new visual and touch techniques.

Richard Burn, currently studying for a doctorate in music technology at Birmingham City University’s Integra Lab, hopes his research will give people who are deaf a greater opportunity to express themselves and help enable them to create new works for audiences who are deaf and hard of hearing. Musicians who are deaf tend to favor acoustic instruments, quite often percussion, which produce a distinct physical feedback from vibration generated by the instrument, alongside more subtle visual clues. When using electronic instruments, they often find it more difficult to resolve some of the characteristics of sound, such as pitch and harmonics.

Burn proposes the creation of a new musical interface that will combine haptic and visual forms of feedback to create a more inclusive experience for all. Alongside vibrations, visual indicators will appear on a digital display that collectively form a sonic fingerprint when an instrument is played, highlighting different components that make up the sound.

“Traditional waveform representations are unable to truly describe what music actually sounds like,” said Burn. “There are much more subtle characteristics of sound that may be better represented visually, for example, by using simple shapes and symbols to describe harmonic content. My proposed system will hopefully give deaf players of electronic instruments the same sort of experience as that enjoyed by deaf players of acoustic instruments.”

“I will be conducting a range of interviews and surveys in order to understand what type of feedback would be useful to deaf musicians,” said Burn. An explanatory video regarding the project can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbZ-VYHS9tQ&feature=youtu.be.
Fellow Researchers Work to Unlock Autism’s Mysteries

Autism Speaks has announced a group of four researchers who will work on specific projects to learn more about autism and new treatments.

“Our dedication to translating research into real-world treatments and supports may be best epitomized by our continuing investment in this new generation of autism researchers,” said Rob Ring, Autism Speaks chief science officer. “These are the remarkable scientists whose careers will convert breakthroughs in science and technology into interventions that can transform lives.”

The two-year fellowships support exceptional scientists beginning their careers in autism research with projects that will include both laboratory research and clinical studies. They will each work under the guidance of two or more mentors who rank among the field’s leaders.

Alan Lewis will study the safety, effectiveness and biological action of transdermal nicotine as a potential treatment for destructive and disruptive behavior in people who have autism. Research suggests that in some individuals with autism, aggressive behavior may result from problems affecting the brain’s nicotinic acetylcholine receptors. Early studies with animals show that nicotine reduces aggression.

Alexandros Kanellopoulos will advance understanding of how changes in a specific gene may contribute to autism-related communication problems. Such changes have been associated with autism, epilepsy and schizophrenia. The gene regulates the production of proteins that play a crucial role in the function of the brain’s nerve cells.

Sarah Baum will explore possible causes of sensory-processing difficulties in people with autism and how it can contribute to communication challenges. She will study brain and physiological responses to sensory input in children affected by autism and will use this information to design a training program aimed at improving sensory processing and communication skills.

Gil Sharon will research why many people with autism have abnormal levels of digestive bacteria, which causes gastrointestinal difficulties and body-wide inflammation. His goal is to advance understanding of how this may contribute to autism’s core symptoms and hopefully produce potential treatments.

“Because autism is enormously complex and wide-ranging in its challenges, we welcome the broad scope of interests, from sensory and gastrointestinal issues to molecular pathways in the brain, seen in these fellows and their projects,” said Paul Wang, Autism Speaks vice president and head of medical research. “By combining their fresh energy and new perspectives with the expertise and resources of their mentors, we expect to see their contributions to the well-being of people with autism continue for many years to come.”

The grant for the fellowship research programs were made possible through a gift given to Autism Speaks by the estate of Charles Meixner, who had a daughter with autism. At the time, she was diagnosed as having infantile schizophrenia.

“Little was known about the disorder at that time and even less was available with respect to intervention and treatment,” said Meixner family spokesperson Hector de Marchena. “For this reason, our Uncle Charles made clear his desire to bequeath this gift to Autism Speaks.”
MENTAL HEALTH REPORT
Continued from page 3

can serve as models for other states. Legislation that NAMI considered ill-informed or discriminatory is marked with a red flag. However, these markings apply only to specific legislation and do not reflect a rat-ings apply only to specific legis-

Mental Health Care system.
ing of any state’s overall men-
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Mental Health Report

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Thirty-five states adopted one or more measures in 2015 that received gold stars. Minnesota, New York and Virginia stand out as the year’s leaders. Fourteen states received red flags. NAMI also identified five bills passed in 2015 that they consider as effective models for other states. They include Arizona’s housing bill, Minnesota’s first episode psychosis program bill, Utah’s criminal justice and mental health bill, Virginia’s psychiatric inpatient beds bill and Washington state’s Telehealth bill.

The report also highlights effective legislation in areas that include Medicaid, insurance parity, workforce capacity, school-based mental health programs and suicide prevention.

The full report is available at www.nami.org/statereport.

United Spinal

Continued from page 8

regulate Uber either. One doesn’t have to be a city planning genius to predict that Uber vehicles will mass on New York City’s borders, Westchester and Nassau and, unregulated, spend the day in Manhattan clogging streets and being inaccessible to wheelchair users.

Worse, however, is that the first draft of the legislation only requires Uber to take folding wheelchairs – that is they won’t have to operate accessible vehicles anywhere in the state and if the mayors of Albany, Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, Elmira, Utica, etc. want accessible vehicles in their cities, it will be too late – the legislature already would have given Uber a pass.

Gov. Cuomo, we need your help. Please do not support perpetuating the inaccessibility of Uber vehicles.

Caregivers

Continued from page 3

and Community Based Medicaid Waiver program in New York has allowed for everyone in the family to be paid except the parents.

“This is wonderful news for families across all New York state. There is no one who understands the complex needs and challenges of a child with a disability better than a parent,” said Assemblymember Joe Morelle (D-136), who co-sponsored the bill.

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