PIST AT U.N.
Advocates Demonstrate For Better Busing

Robert Acevedo of Disabled in Action of NY expresses support for the goal of better school transportation, while Lisa Lockley of DB-TIP interprets. In inset photo at left Edward Yood of CWA Local 1180 Committee on People With Disabilities and Disability Pride NYC speaks on Civil and Human Rights, while Katie Peacock Helde of DB-TIP interprets.

According to Sara Catalinotto of Parents to Improve School Transportation (PIST NYC) this “starts with school bus service that gets students to school, on time and safely, whether they are... Continued on page 16
Gov Launches Caregiver Initiative

In recognition of the recent National Family Caregivers Month, Gov. Kathy Hochul had urged state workers to complete a survey on their experiences balancing their jobs with caregiving tasks and encouraged private employers to do the same. Hochul hoped to raise awareness of unpaid working caregivers and the statewide resources available to help them.

“In addition to making historic investments to expand our long-term care workforce, I am excited to be giving back to the more than four million unpaid caregivers who have already dedicated their time and energy to caring for loved ones,” she said. “By recognizing this work as the valuable and crucial caregiving it is, individuals can better connect with the many state and local resources and supports specific to their needs.”

Recognizing the unique stresses on working caregivers, the State Office for the Aging and the State Department of Labor launched a project to survey state employees and gain insight on the impact of caregiving on the workplace. The initiative also promoted “Caregivers in the Workplace,” a 32-page guide providing information to help employers support working caregivers.

New York State has more than four million unpaid caregivers. These are family members, friends or neighbors who provide uncompensated care and support to someone else, such as a spouse, an older parent, children or someone with chronic or other medical conditions.

Unpaid caregivers perform a range of tasks for loved ones, such as accompanying them to medical appointments, providing help with bathing and dressing, shopping assistance and meal preparation, transportation, bill paying, household chores and more. Yet more than 50 percent of individuals in this role do not identify themselves as caregivers.

AARP estimates that the services provided by unpaid caregivers would cost roughly $32 billion annually.

New York has led a multi-strategy approach to assist family caregivers, through historic investments in the long-term care workforce, respite and social adult day care services of the older population served by the Office for the Aging; and a landmark paid family leave policy, benefiting not only families, but caregivers as well.

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New York has led a multi-strategy approach to assist family caregivers, through historic investments in the long-term care workforce, respite and social adult day care services offered through state and local offices for the aging, a landmark paid family leave program, paid sick leave laws and more.

Individuals needing support caring for an older adult or person with disabilities may contact the NY Connects helpline at 1-800-342-9871 or the NY Connects Resources Directory, a trusted resource for free, objective information about long term services and supports in New York State.

About one in six employees in the United States is a caregiver for a relative or friend. On average, these individuals spend more than 20 hours per week providing some form of care. U.S. businesses lose as much as $33.6 billion annually in caregiver-related turnover, absenteeism, and loss of productivity, according to one estimate. This includes situations where caregivers have no choice but to arrive late or leave work early, make phone calls during work time, leave work to respond to emergencies, or miss work altogether.

Employees also have chosen to forgo promotions, have gone from full-time to part-time or leave work altogether to continue their caregiving work.

For individuals providing care to an older person and a child at the same time, 85 percent experienced mental health symptoms and 52 percent reported suicidal thoughts, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Other data from the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP found that 70 percent of working caregivers suffer work-related difficulties due to their dual roles; and 69 percent of caregivers reported having to rearrange their work schedule, decrease their hours or take unpaid leave in order to meet responsibilities.
Adams Gets Pushback On Rescue Plan

By Allison Howe

A district judge in Manhattan recently ruled not to halt New York City Mayor Eric Adams’ extensive plan to combat mental illness, stating that he wants more time to explore the situation and that he saw no evidence that irreversibly harm would come to city residents until he makes his final ruling in the coming weeks.

Adams’ plan seeks to address the proliferation of the mentally ill being untreated and unsheltered, by hospitalizing them when deemed necessary. But this strategy was swiftly met by intense pushback from many state agencies, as well as disability and civil rights advocates. New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) and a coalition of other groups filed an emergency request in federal court to stop the mayor’s plan of force people who are mentally ill into treatment.

“Mental health crises are not matters for law enforcement. They are healthcare issues that must be appropriately handled by health professionals, rather than police, whose involvement routinely causes more trauma,” said Marinda van Dalen, senior staff attorney at NYLPI.

Coalitions Rallied

The coalition rallied at City Hall soon after Adams announced his plan. In addition, NYLPI published a lengthy statement on its website, detailing various reasons for their opposition, including the claim that the mayor’s plan is unconstitutional.

However, a statement from Adams’ office said, “The directive seeks to dispel a persistent myth that the legal standard for involuntary intervention requires an overt act demonstrating that the person is violent, suicidal or engaging in outrageously dangerous behavior likely to result in imminent harm.”

“In accordance with state law and court precedent, clarification that outreach workers, city-operated hospitals and first responders have the legal authority to provide care to New Yorkers when severe mental illness prevents them from meeting their own basic human needs to the extent that they are a danger to themselves,” said Adams.

During Adams’ address, he gave an immediate directive to city agencies and contractors involved in evaluating and providing care to individuals in psychiatric crisis. He also laid out an 11-point legislative agenda that aims to fix gaps in the state’s Mental Hygiene Law and will be among his top priorities in Albany during the upcoming legislative session.

Clinical Response Teams

He also announced new clinical response teams deployed in subways to respond to those with serious mental health issues, as well as enhanced training in partnership with the state for all first responders.

In addition, the city is developing a tele-consult telephone line to provide police officers in the field with direct access to clinicians. This new line will provide clinical advice to police officers when dealing with individuals in distress.

Many other measures will be taken, such as mandating that hospital clinicians consider a range of factors when assessing a patient’s need for involuntary admission or retention, including known treatment history and current ability to adhere to outpatient treatment.

Additionally, hospitals will be required to screen all psychiatric patients and collaborate with community providers prior to discharge for their need to receive assisted outpatient treatment.

Adams said that to plan for the cold winter months, when homelessness typically increases on subways, his administration has begun deploying subway clinical co-response teams made up of joint patrols of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and the New York City Police Department (NYPD). They are patrolling high-traffic subway stations and will respond with a clinician-led approach to those appearing to have serious mental health issues.

“You can’t effectively have public safety without adequate mental health care. The two go hand-in-hand,” said Deputy Mayor for Public Safety Philip Banks. “For too long, public safety personnel’s hands have been tied in getting those in need of care, before they hurt themselves or others.”

“With today’s announcement, Adams has reaffirmed his commitment to meeting the concurrent crises of untreated mental illness and unsheltered homelessness head on,” said New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) Commissioner Gary Jenkins.

In February 2022, Adams rolled out his “Subway Safety Plan” to connect people experiencing homelessness on the subway to shelter. Since that launch, the city has effectively connected more than 3,000 people experiencing homelessness, some of whom are also in mental health crisis, to shelters and safe havens.

Clubhouse Program

Adams has also expanded the city’s clubhouse program, a one-stop treatment facility that helps people with severe mental illnesses through their recovery by providing peer support, access to services, employment and educational opportunities, socialization, and recreation in a safe and structured setting.

MHANYS’ Concerns

Mental Health Association in New York State (MHANYS) is one of the agencies that has concerns about the mayor’s plan, prompting them to write a detailed letter to Gov. Kathy Hochul and Adams. Some of their recommendations include fully funding the state’s Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), increased wages for support staff, better coordination of care just before release from the hospital or prison, or more psychiatric hospital beds.

“Law Enforcement should not be the lead agency in determining an individual’s need for hospitalization. The notion of blaming mental health issues as the major factor of homelessness and violence is a false equivalency,” MHANYS wrote. “It does not take into account that there are people who are violent without a mental health concern or that they have significant mitigating factors involved like history of violence, family history of trauma, domestic violence and many other factors. Instead of using this as an opportunity to put in...

Continued on page 16

Custom Plates Support Anti-Stigma

The New York Department of Motor Vehicles is offering a license plate in support of mental health awareness that features the slogan “Healthy Minds, Healthy New York.”

The plate is available to order online, at a DMV office, by phone or through the mail, although online orders process faster.

The custom plate fee varies if the plate number is assigned by DMV or if personalization is requested. The fee is in addition to the annual registration fee. The plates are billed every two years and registration is renewed. $25 of the annual fee supports the Mental Illness Anti-Stigma Fund.

The initial fee for an assigned license plate is $85 and the annual renewal fee is $36.25. Personalized plates are $116.25 initially with an annual renewal cost of $87.50.

To order, one must have a valid New York State registration that does not expire within 60 days.

PAGE 3 JANUARY 2023 - NEW YORK ABLE NEWSPAPER
New York City Mayor Eric Adams and New York City Department of Education (DOE) Chancellor David Banks recently announced an expansion of early childhood education special-education seats across the five boroughs, in partnership with community-based providers, that will make an early childhood education special-education seat available for every child living with a disability by the spring of 2023.

Previously, the early childhood education system did not have a strategic or intentional focus on serving young children living with disabilities and their families. Through a citywide contract enhancement process, New York City Public Schools is addressing this inequity by expanding the number of seats reserved for students living with disabilities across early childhood education and increasing pay for educators and providers.

“I know from personal experience what it’s like not to have had the supports I needed to learn and thrive as a child,” said Adams. “For far too long, our young students living with disabilities have struggled in a system that hasn’t been fully able to support them where they are. Today, we’re demonstrating that.

“For far too long, children with disabilities and their families have been overlooked by a system that was not built with them in mind,” said Banks. “Our vision for early childhood education sees all children. My team has particularly been focused on young children living with disabilities. We are deeply committed to establishing early childhood education that works for all New York City families – a truly accessible, high-quality and sustainable program that equitably serves our children living with disabilities.

Previously, early childhood seats for children living with disabilities were few and limited, and their educators were paid less than their general education peers. As part of Banks’ long-term vision to reimagine early childhood education and special-education programming in New York City public schools, all children will have access to educators and resources that meet their needs as soon as they enter the classroom.

To ensure that early childhood education programs are prepared to meet the needs of the city’s most vulnerable children, the first set of special education contract enhancements will be implemented across 65 provider contracts.

As part of this process, approximately 3,000 seats across the sector will benefit, including 400 new seats to meet needs. By this spring, an additional 400 new seats are planned for a total of 800 new seats, and additional seats will be stabilized by the contract enhancement process.

Additionally, special education contract enhancements will earmark $130 million for early childhood education special education providers over two years; Align early childhood education special education programs with the city’s 3-K and pre-K general education programs by extending the school day from five hours to six hours and 20 minutes and providing extended care and learning for children and support for working families; Extend general early childhood education contract enhancements across 65 provider contracts; and

Allocate funds for teacher and staff salaries in accordance with new services and lengthened school days; and

Bring increased pay and parity to teaching staff in special education programs to match that of their peers in general education in 3-K and pre-K.

This announcement comes on the heels of Banks’ renewed vision for special education programs in New York City public schools, which celebrates and expands successful programs, provides new professional learning opportunities to students and empowers family and community members as partners in this work.

New York’s Public Health and Health Planning Council has approved regulations that will guide the implementation of two laws passed in 2021. An average of 3.5 hours of care a day for each nursing home resident is now required. Prior to the law’s passage there were no minimum staffing requirements in New York. In order to meet these standards, most nursing home owners will have to hire more caregivers.

Nursing home owners must now spend 70 percent of their revenue on quality resident care, with 40 percent of that for staffing. The regulations were passed unanimously; industry representatives testified in opposition and stated their need for more funding in order to follow the law.

Amessa Brown, a C.N.A. at Yorktown Nursing Home and 1199SEIU member said, “There must be laws because we have already seen that too many nursing home owners will not do what is necessary on their own.

“It is impossible for any C.N.A. to do the job of giving compassionate care when she has 13 to 20 residents to care for at once. When this happens to me, I feel terrible that I have not been able to give my residents what they deserve,” Brown said.

1199SEIU United Health-care Workers East is the largest and fastest-growing health care union in America, representing more than 450,000 nurses and caregivers throughout Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Florida.
Mayor Releases NYC Speaks Plan

New York City Mayor Eric Adams recently released the NYC Speaks Action Plan, created in partnership with civic and community leaders and outlining policy goals for five issue areas that are priorities for New Yorkers – housing and public safety, youth mental health, community spaces, jobs in high-growth sectors, and civic engagement.

NYC Speaks is a public-private partnership led by Deputy Mayor for Strategic Initiatives Sheena Wright, working alongside various philanthropic partners, community leaders and civic institutions to inform the priorities and policies of the Adams administration.

“New Yorkers deserve a seat at the table to share their vision for our city’s future. It is why I engage and speak with community groups in all five boroughs every day, making sure I hear their concerns and dreams,” said Adams.

“Having that input from New Yorkers is helping us get stuff done the right way. But I am only just one person and that’s why I am grateful to NYC Speaks for conducting the largest public policy survey in our city’s history, asking over 62,000 New Yorkers what their priorities are. Those responses led to our administration creating an action plan that covers five key issues crucial to New Yorkers’ success and well-being. When working together, our community can address the issues that affect their lives the most.”

The Action Plan is the result of a yearlong partnership. More than 80 members of the Civic Policy Councils, representing a diverse cross-section of New Yorkers, collaborated on the research and outreach strategies for the initiative. Policy council members led the development of the NYC Speaks survey questions, which captured more than 62,000 responses, totaling 3 million data points, from New Yorkers across every residential ZIP code.

These efforts included outreach support from many government agencies. Notably, the NYC Youth Speaks Survey was formulated and shared with the support of the DOE to young people across New York City with more than 18,400 youth participating.

Following the results of the quantitative data, NYC Speaks launched community conversations to bring the survey data back to communities to interpret and help develop tangible actions.

A total of 50 community-based organizations received micro-grants to bring conversations to their communities, and 30 young people also joined the initiative as youth ambassadors and led conversations in their community.

In total, NYC Speaks facilitated more than 220 community conversations that convened in eight languages with 4,800 residents.

The events were hosted online and in-person in all five boroughs, and served populations that have been historically marginalized, such as Black and Brown residents, seniors, those impacted by the criminal justice system, people living with disabilities, women, and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Settlement Ensures Students With Diabetes Receive Care

A federal court has preliminarily approved a landmark settlement that will ensure children with diabetes in New York City receive the care they need to fully participate in school and school-related activities.

This class action settlement resolves claims that New York City, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Office of School Health systematically failed to ensure that students with diabetes could attend school safely and have access to the same educational opportunities as their peers, in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the New York City Human Rights Law.

Under the agreement, the defendants must modify their policies, practices and procedures related to the needs of students with diabetes. Students with diabetes may not be excluded or segregated from their classmates. They must also provide training for staff and contractors including nurses, paraprofessionals, administrators, bus drivers and attendants and teachers and other staff.

The settlement also provides for close monitoring and reporting as well as the appointment of the American Diabetes Association as the joint expert, and Peter Blanck as external monitor, for a term of three school years.

The United States District Judge Nina Gershon granted preliminary approval to the proposed settlement and set a date of April 19 for a Fairness Hearing.

The Action Plan contains five key “North Stars” that address support for formerly incarcerated New Yorkers; students having access to mental health resources; capital investments in spaces that support social, economic and climate resilience; access to green career pathways created by city-led decarbonization; and resilience efforts and government transformation and improvement.

“NYC Speaks provided a platform for stakeholders with disabilities to address their concerns directly,” said Sharon McLennon-Wier, executive director, Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York. “Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York serves New Yorkers with disabilities in each of the five boroughs and are always looking for better methods to advocate for our community. This is the first time in years that I have seen that opportunity given to the public, especially in such an intricate manner.”
T he National Council on Disability (NCD) Remembers Robert “Bobby” Silverstein, 73, who died Nov. 17.

Bobby played a critical role in advancing disability policy.

Prior to working on Capitol Hill, he was co-founder of a law firm that focused on public policy analyses for Federal, State, and local officials and representation of persons with disabilities and their families. He was also the staff director of a congressionally-mandated study of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act at the National Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

He served in both the U.S. House of Representatives, as counsel to the Subcommittee on Select Education of the Committee on Education and Labor, and Senate, as staff director and chief counsel for the Subcommittee on Disability Policy of the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources and chief aide to Sen. Tom Harkin, who sponsored the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

He was a bi-partisan consensus-builder in making the ADA a reality and was known as the “behind-the-scenes architect of the ADA” and more than 20 disability-related bills that were enacted into law.

After leaving government service, he continued his public policy work with the Center for the Study and Advancement of Disability Policy where his work was used for NCD’s 2006 “Creating Livable Communities” report. Most recently he served as principal at the law firm of Powers Pyles Sutter and Verville.

Bobby Silverstein spent his adult life in Washington, D.C. and was probably most famous for providing meaningful service criteria.

In 1992, Bobby was part of a class action lawsuit that required SEPTA in Philadelphia, the oldest, largest rail cities in the U.S., to retrofit at least “key” stations, make all new buses accessible, and provide paratransit with meaningful service criteria.

That first day, Bobby and I realized we’d met before. I was there to help craft the ADA accessible transportation requirements, having successfully sued MTA in New York City and SEPTA in Philadelphia. The oldest, largest rail cities in the U.S. had agreed to retrofit at least “key” stations, make all new buses accessible, and provide paratransit with meaningful service criteria.

He was smart, funny, strategic and compassionate. I am sure his passing has left an enormous void for his wife, children and grandchildren. I know that he is irreplaceable. His contribution to the history of disability rights is quietly legion.

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OBITUARY

Mental Health Advocate, Celia Brown Dies

By Angela Miele Melledy

Celia Brown died after a bout of breast cancer in December at the age of 59. According to colleague and friend Harvey Rosenthal, CEO New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS), Brown skillfully straddled the worlds of government and advocacy. She was referred to as the Mother of the consumer/survivor/ex-patient movement.

A psychiatric survivor and advocate for people with psychiatric disabilities, she was the first Peer Specialist for the New York State Office of Mental Health, where she provided technical assistance and support to people with psychiatric disabilities and their families.

She subsequently rose to the position of Regional Advocacy Specialist for the Bureau of Recipient Affairs at the New York City Field Office, New York State Office of Mental Health where she facilitated training on peer supervision, wellness and recovery approaches in community mental health agencies.

Brown served as the President of the Board of MindFreedom International and served as their main representative to the UN. She was the President of the Board of MindFreedom International and served as their main representative to the UN. She was the President of the Board of MindFreedom International and served as their main representative to the UN. She was the President of the Board of MindFreedom International and served as their main representative to the UN. She was the President of the Board of MindFreedom International and served as their main representative to the UN.

Brown was a founding member of the National People of Color/Consumer Survivor Network; worked on planning the New York City Conference for Working Peer Specialists; and hosted virtual peer support groups on Saturday afternoons for 14 months during the pandemic.

She co-founded Surviving Race: The Intersection of Race, Disability and Human Rights Coalition in 2014 to explore the intersections between race and disability in the human rights movement.

“Celia inspired her fellow advocates to speak out against inhumane practices, racism and stigma,” said Gita Enders, Director of the Office of Behavioral Health Medical and Professional Affairs, NYC Health + Hospitals. “She skillfully and intuitively traversed her multiple roles with grace and discretion.”

Celia was and will always be one of our movement’s most cherished and most influential leaders; a very kind, devoted, determined and humble leader who led the way in the advancement of rights-based advocacy, peer support, trauma informed approaches, cultural competence and humility, peer specialist roles and numerous efforts to combat racism and discrimination,” said Rosenthal.

“Celia is my hero, my Cape Crusader and deserves a send-off that is bigger than just a regular Home-going service,” Brown’s sister Jocelyn Brown said on Facebook. “There will be two ceremonies. One ceremony will be in Ghana, West Africa in the beginning of April where her ashes will live in the waters of our ancestors.

The Brown family is also planning a Memorial Service during Black History Month, to celebrate and honor historical leaders past and present. The date and time will be announced at a later date.”

Brown, a life-long resident of the Bronx, is survived by her long-time partner Kevin Walker, son “Little” Kevin Walker Jr., her Mother Marva, brother Norman, sister Jocelyn and numerous nieces and nephews.

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As the holiday season concludes, we are facing a sense of dread as we approach our mailboxes. Some of us might have overspent our financial resources to obtain gifts and presents for our friends and family. We want to give to others because the joy of the holiday season tells us to give to others and we will be rewarded with much blessing. However, at times, we forget that our spending must match our ability to afford the payment of these purchases.

As you sit to review the credit card statements that are due this month, do not stress. Please make a plan this year to change the fiscal dread. Let us work together to develop a realistic budget that can incorporate savings to address the holiday shopping. Unfortunately, some people with disabilities were not taught the salient skills associated with budgeting and savings. CIDNY can teach you these skills with our financial literacy workshops that can help plan for the next holiday season. We can show you how you can plan to save each week towards the funding needed to shop for holidays gifts and presents during December of 2023.

This method of saving for future expenses can reduce the unnecessary stress, anxiety, and guilt you might experience during January of 2024. You can learn to save to spend for what you can afford, and furthermore, learn to save wisely for what you cannot afford. You can plan for the next holiday season. You can actualize being a smart shopper and learn to shop wisely during the year and save in the process. You can develop a list of shopping goals with names of people to shop for and the cost of the desired items. Having this type of information incorporated in your saving plan will keep you on track for the holiday shopping season.

Please contact CIDNY and learn more information about all the literacy workshops that we offer to assist you. Follow us at CIDNY.org to participate in group sessions to learn additional information to help you this year in successfully navigating the road of financial literacy and wellness.

We are here to help you.
Diabetes Leading Cause Of New Blindness In Adults

According to the 2022 National Diabetes Statistics Report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 11 percent of the U.S. population (approximately 37.3 million people) has diabetes.

The study also found that 38 percent of adults 18 and older in the U.S., some 96 million people, have prediabetes. Diabetes is the leading cause of new blindness among adults from 18 to 64, according to a Prevent Blindness news release.

Daniel Laroche, a New York City eye specialist, said, “To help prevent diabetes, it is essential to have an excellent diet with salads, vegetables and fruits and reduce bread and rice intake. Exercise 30 minutes a day. Meditate for 15-30 minutes a day. Drink green tea and reduce sleep apnea and snoring by sleeping on the side and not directly on your back. Controlling weight helps to reduce diabetes and retinopathy.”

“Many people with diabetes may not know about the damaging effects the disease can have on vision. “Regular dilated eye examinations are essential to detect diabetic retinopathy early and provide vision saving treatments when ready,” he added.

Laroche is a glaucoma specialist who wants people to be aware that glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration and retinopathy can begin to surface between the ages of 40 and 70.

“Over time these diseases can lead to blindness, so it’s best to address them as soon as possible,” said Laroche. “We have new treatments with earlier surgical options that can help preserve or restore their vision with faster recovery times.”

Glaucoma is the leading cause of blindness in African Americans and people from the Caribbean, and the simplest way to prevent the devastating effects of glaucoma is to maintain regular eye visits. “Eyesight or human vision is one of the most important senses,” LaRoche said. “As much as 80 percent of what we feel comes through our sense of sight. By protecting the eyes, people will reduce the chance of blindness and vision loss while also staying on top of any potential eye diseases, such as glaucoma and cataracts.”

Loan Program Aims To Retain Pros

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) recently announced $9 million in state funding for an educational loan repayment program to help community mental health agencies recruit and retain psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners.

Administered by the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) and the Higher Education Services Corps of New York State, the Community Mental Health Loan Repayment Program will provide loan repayments of up to $120,000 for psychiatrists and $30,000 for psychiatric nurse practitioners, provided they remain employed by licensed community mental health programs for three years. Both existing and newly hired providers at licensed community mental health programs are eligible to apply. Workers awarded funds through the program must fulfill a three-year commitment.

According to a Prevent Blindness news release, “Among adults from 18 to 64, leading cause of new blindness and vision loss people will reduce the chance of blindness and vision loss while also staying on top of any potential eye diseases, such as glaucoma and cataracts.”
Audiences ‘See’ Blindness in ‘Odd Man Out’

By David Block

A group of Hispanic New York based actors recently presented the world premiere of the immersive production, “Odd Man Out” at the Bristol Riverside Theatre (BRT) in Bristol, Penn. The show was presented by Teatro Ciego (Theatre for the Blind) and Theatre C.

The story was about Alberto Rinaldia played by Gonzalo Trigueros, a blind jazz musician flying from New York back home to Argentina. During the flight, Alberto shared his New York experiences with some of his passengers. However, throughout the show, the theatre was dark in order for the audience to get a taste of Alberto’s world.

Sitting in the dark was unquestionably difficult for most audience members, but preparing to perform in a pitch black theatre was also challenging for a lot of the cast members. Despite the cast’s struggles they ended up empathizing with blind people and their ways of living in a fully sighted world.

“Before I played a blind character, I had to do a lot of research,” said Trigueros. “It helped that our co-director, Facundo Bogarin is blind.”

The rest of the cast and crew were fully sighted.

Being in “Odd Man Out” gave Trigueros empathy for a condition outside of his own. “That’s a beautiful thing about acting; to be able to immerse yourself in the lives of people who are different,” he said.

This was Trigueros’s first time having to take orders and direction from a blind person.

“It was wonderful,” said Trigueros. “I have to admit it was scary to see Facundo move around so well on stage.”

For seven years, Bogarin directed fully sighted actors. “Odd Man Out’s” other co-director Carlos Armesto said that actors always showed him respect because of the confident way that he carries himself. “He knows what he is doing at all times,” said Armesto.

Andres Montejo, who portrayed passenger Christian, recalled the early days of rehearsal in the dark. “The first day we rehearsed in the dark, I remember lifting my hand very close to my face and I couldn’t tell that it was there. I remember that was a very daunting moment.”

It took us time to learn how to safely move in the dark without hurting anyone. We started doing different processes of identifying the space with touch and sound. It was a very long process of getting comfortable with that. We had a total of 32 rehearsals.

“It was an incredible experience for me to not only be taught by Facundo but to also deal with him like he was one of us.” He soon stopped looking at him as a blind person but as the show’s co-director.

He learned to view people with disabilities like he did everyone else.

The cast hopes to perform this show in New York. A different version of the show was slated to have debuted at the Argentinian consulate in New York City in 2020, but plans fell through due to the pandemic.

“In 2021, we did an at home (virtual) version with the piece,” said Armesto. “Audiences watching the show virtually were encouraged to wear blindfolds and headphones to experience a live audio experience in total darkness.”

Armesto elaborated that at the end of 2021, they did a semi-live/virtual version of “Odd Man Out” in New York. Armesto said that Alberto’s story coupled with the way that the show was presented, intrigued the live audiences.

The cast of “Odd Man Out” are, left to right: Aazkara Gilchrist, Gonzalo Trigueros, Lorenza Bernasconi, Esteban Arias, Andres Montejo, Mauricio Marte, Carmen Borla, Facundo Bogarin, Carlos Armesto, Nicolás Alvarez, Agustina Cedraschi, Tyler Herald, Henry Hanson.
A leading developer and service provider of electric mobility chairs, announced today the first permanent installation in North America of its autonomous mobility service at Winnipeg Richardson International Airport.

An estimated one in three travelers will need some form of assistance by the year 2038, making it difficult for airports to meet the additional demands that come with accommodating their needs.

The WHILL autonomous mobility service relieves airlines of fulfilling wheelchair push demands and allows airline passengers to travel more freely by autonomously transporting them to their gates.

After the user selects their destination on a touch screen, the autonomous power chair proceeds to transport the passenger safely and reliably to the desired gate. The service covers the entire route from check-in counter to security checkpoint, and then to the departure gate to provide a seamless travel experience.

The service has been tested during several development trials at the Winnipeg Airport since 2019.

“The addition of their innovative autonomous mobility device as a fully available service at Winnipeg Richardson International Airport is another example of our commitment to providing a more accessible and inclusive environment,” said Nick Hays, president and CEO of Winnipeg Airports Authority.

Previous trials of the autonomous service in U.S. airports have included Atlanta, San Jose and Grand Rapids. WHILL plans to announce partnerships with additional airports in North America in 2023.
Blind Student Participates In NASA Mission

By Jeremy Morak

Three years ago, 15-year-old high school student Matthew Cho lived a happy, everyday teenage life until he was diagnosed with a brain tumor, resulting in two surgeries to remove the malignant mass.

When Cho awoke after the second surgery, he was left completely blind. The sudden loss of sight shocked him and his family and created a challenging roadmap that required mental fortitude and painstaking hard work to get his life back on track.

He transferred to the New York Institute, a school designed to help students with disabilities, and started receiving services at Lighthouse Guild.

Three years later, at 18-year-old, he’s getting set to graduate high school, has continued his passion for playing and teaching music and just returned from NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, where he participated virtually in a mission in outer space.

The Artemis I mission aboard the Orion spacecraft was, in November, the first un-crewed rocket ever sent to space. Alexa, the AI voice of Amazon, powered the rocket.

Earlier this year, Amazon and Lockheed Martin announced plans to integrate Alexa into the Orion spacecraft for Artemis I, the first of several NASA missions intended to bring the first woman and the next man to the Moon.

On Dec. 9, Cho was chosen to represent Lighthouse Guild at NASA’s space station to join the virtual Artemis crew and tour the facility.

During the tour, Cho learned about the process that astronauts must go through to prepare for missions, and the conditions they face while in space.

He was also able to touch the various materials that are part of the astronaut suit to protect them from the extreme conditions. “The coolest

Continued on page 16

Law Protects Patients Facing Medical Bills

Gov. Kathy Hochul has signed legislation to protect patients facing steep medical bills that can lead to wage garnishment or liens against their property.

“No one should face the threat of losing their home or falling into further debt after seeking medical care,” Hochul said. “I’m proud to sign legislation today that will end this harmful and predatory collection practice to help protect New Yorkers from these unfair penalties. With medical debt a burden for far too many, this is an important step to address this crucial issue.”

The legislation amends the civil practice law and rules to prohibit health care providers from placing home liens on an individual’s primary residence or garnishing wages to collect on medical debt.

Nearly half of American adults struggle to afford health care costs, and more than 50,000 New Yorkers have been sued for medical debt over the past five years; this problem is most pervasive upstate. Previously, hospitals or health care providers had been able to impose and enforce liens on a patient’s primary residence to satisfy a judgment in a medical debt lawsuit, leading to housing instability and financial consequences for vulnerable New Yorkers.

“I want to thank Gov. Hochul for signing my bill into law to protect New Yorkers from facing liens on their homes or wage garnishment by medical institutions in their efforts to collect medical debt. We must work together to eradicate medical debt from our State and I am thrilled that we are taking this important first step,” State Sen. Gustavo Rivera said.

“New Yorkers struggle with health care costs even when they have insurance. People seeking care end up with bills to cover ever-increasing out-of-pocket costs, including high deductibles, copays and the various fees insurance doesn’t cover.

People’s homes and income should not be threatened to satisfy medical debt. I thank Gov. Hochul for signing S.6522A/A.7363A into law to help protect patients from these egregious practices,” Assemblymember Richard Gottfried said.

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As we saw last month, the story of “Pivotal Year 1968” [Able Newspaper Dec. 2022] was all about foundational gains notched by the founders of the New York City Disability Rights Movement. From free parking at meters to the establishment of the Mayor’s Office for the Handicapped, accessibility provisions for the City’s Building Code and the amendment of the City’s Human Rights Law to bar discrimination against the handicapped for the first time anywhere, 1968 was the culmination of efforts many years in the making.

Where that first pivotal year was a story of unprecedented organizational, political and statutory advances by and for New Yorkers with disabilities, to me the crux of the next pivotal year, 1978, was a matter of generational succession. Within a few years after the high water mark of 1968, the tide began to turn. And the shift came at the hands of young people, barely past twenty years of age.

Fifty years on, it is difficult to recapture the intensity of the “Generation Gap” that seized the United States in the late 1960s. Just as it is difficult for anyone born after, say, 1980, to fully grasp that the Boomer generation wasn’t always large and in charge and that once upon a time the Boomers were young, scrappy, insurgent idealists. But the Generation Gap was a real thing at the end of the decade of protest, and the City’s disability movement was as affected by it as anything else.

By the early 1970s, a new corps of disability activists was coming on the scene. They included people at Long Island University led by Judy Heumann, folks at Goldwater Hospital and a group at Brooklyn College led by Fred Francis and Pat Figueroa. Mostly born in the 1940s, many of them were alumni of Camp Jened, a summer camp for disabled children. They founded Disabled in Action and other new groups, and brought a much more confrontational, Sixties-style aggression to the cause.

Where the founders argued for legal rights and a representative foothold in government, the Boomers argued frankly for “CIVIL RIGHTS” in capital letters and openly expressed their anger at the traditional consignment to social limbo. They blocked traffic and seized offices and picketed telethons – actions that the founders, who’d lived through the McCarthy Era, never seriously considered.

Where the founders wore suits to their protests, the Boomers wore fatigues and ponchos. Where the founders had established lives and careers that they were trying to protect and advance, the Boomers had the nothing-to-lose flexibility of youth. So the Boomers didn’t petition for rights—they demanded them.

The founders looked at the Boomers and saw kids, recklessly courting backlash. The Boomers looked at the founders and saw conservative old men, treading too lightly.

To say the least, the Boomers’ entry into the City’s disability rights movement was divisive. The two groups had a tough time working together at first, and there wasn’t much cross-pollination. So World War II generation activists had relatively little buy-in to DIA or, for example, its big protests against Nixon’s veto of the 1972 Rehabilitation Act, and the young hippie-looking activists initially had little presence at the Mayor’s Office for the Handicapped (MOH, now MOPD), one of the founders’ most important institutional accomplishments.

Perhaps the lowest ebb came in 1974, with the protest against gas rationing during the OPEC oil embargo. The state failed to provide a gas-rationing exemption for disabled drivers, and it refused to listen to community input. A public action became an obvious necessity. But where military veterans like Don Broderick of the Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association (EPVA) had been an active and public part of the founders’ efforts, between the Generation Gap and young people’s antipathy for the Vietnam War, civilians and veteran activists had grown so far apart that there were actually two gas rationing protests, one by veterans and another by civilians, each separated by a week or so.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH

For more about Warren Shaw’s work in disability history visit www.DisabilityHistoryNYC.com.
TLC SURVEYS PASSENGERS ABOUT ACCESSIBILITY
The New York Taxi & Limousine Commission (TLC) has created a survey to establish a baseline for customer service and security for passengers who use wheelchairs in accessible TLC-licensed vehicles. The survey's purpose is to help understand the customer service experience now and by resurveying the people who have completed it in the future, the commission can assess whether the decision for WAV vehicles is creating an efficient service.

According to TLC, the survey will also help inform their outreach and education work with TLC-licensed drivers so that they can better improve the experience of passengers who use wheelchairs and take taxis, black cars and livery cars. The survey can be completed at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TLCaccessibility.

VIRTUAL ESTATE PLANNING WORKSHOP AVAILABLE
A virtual transition planning workshop will be held from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Monday, Feb. 13.

The workshop will cover accessing, understanding and protecting your child's benefits legally and financially, estate planning for families of children with special needs. Topics will include OPWDD application and eligibility process, government benefits, guardianship and alternatives, special needs trusts and estate planning.

All interested may register by visiting https://transitionplanningnewyork.com.

Regina Brandow, special needs attorney and Brian McIlvain of Suffolk Independent Living Organization will present.

A similar workshop will be held from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Tuesday, April 18 for those who cannot attend in February.

To view previous webinars one may visit www.brandowlaw.com/freevideos.

PUBLIC INVITED TO ONLINE MEETING OF U.S. ACCESS BOARD
The public is welcome to attend the next meeting of the U.S. Access Board, which will be virtually, from standing and ad hoc board committees, the executive director and federal agency updates.

Attendance will be through the Zoom.gov platform or by phone (listen-only mode).

For further information, one may contact Rose Marie Bunales at events/access-board.gov.

The meeting link is https://www.zoom.gov.cn/j/1617695856 and the meeting ID is 161 769 5856.

To dial in, one may call 646 828-7666.

WEBINAR ADDRESSES ADA AND ABA REGS AT DETENTION FACILITIES
Unique security features can pose challenging to designing accessible detention and correctional facilities. The next webinar in the U.S. Access Board’s free monthly series will take place from 2:30 to 4 p.m., Jan. 5 and will provide an overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) accessibility requirements for detention and correctional facilities.

Presenters will review provisions addressing holding cells and housing cells with mobility and medical care facilities along with some additional requirements established by the U.S. Department of Justice.

One may view https://accessibilityonline.org for information or to register. All webinars include video remote interpreting (VRI) and real-time captioning. Questions can be submitted in advance of the session or can be posed during the live webinar. Webinar attendees can earn continuing education credits. The series is hosted by the ADA National Network in cooperation with the U.S. Access Board.

GETTING CREATIVE AT YOUNG PEOPLE’S ART PROGRAM
Kids of all ages and abilities will get to enjoy their choice of recreational activities offered at the creative arts drop-in program at Pelham Fritz Recreation Center.

Activities will be held from 2:30 to 5:45 p.m. every Tuesday through Friday. The center is at 18 Mount Morris Park West between W. 121st and W. 122nd streets in Manhattan.

Participants can enjoy fitness activities and media lab educational programs in addition to playing cards, board games and/or creating their own personalized vision boards.

They also will be able to express themselves through music, art, dance and more.

More information is available by calling 212 860-1373.

AMPUTEE COALITION FORUM DISCOUNTED SIGN-UP OPENS
The Amputee Coalition will hold this year’s Advocacy Forum, themed “Your Voice Matters,” in person, April 16 through 19 at the Hilton Alexandria Mark Center, Alexandria, Va.

This year’s forum will offer an opportunity to meet and speak with Senators and Congress members to advocate on behalf of the limb loss and limb difference population and learn about policy issues facing the community and participate in new training.

A discounted registration rate is available through Jan. 15.

To register or for information, one may visit www.amputee-coalition.org.

UNITED NATIONS TO REVIEW DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE AGENDA

The priority theme is “Creating full and productive employment and decent work for all as a way of overcoming inequalities to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

The commission will review U.N. plans and programs of action pertaining to the situation of social groups, including Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals for persons with disabilities such as the way forward, a disability-inclusive development agenda toward 2015 and beyond; World Program of Action for Youth; the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging; and family issues, policies and programs.

Information is available by visiting www.un.org.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A - Asian; B - Black; C - Christian; D - Divorced; F - Female; G - Gay; H - Hispanic; J - Jewish; M - Male; N/D - Non drinker; N/S - Non Smoker; P - Professional; S - Single; W - White

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Lighthouse Guild And Bionic Sight Form Partnership

Lighthouse Guild, the leading not-for-profit vision and healthcare organization, and Bionic Sight, the developer of treatments and technologies for advanced-stage blindness, have entered into a partnership that will change the landscape of treatment for people who are blind.

Bionic Sight’s technology focuses on restoring sight to patients with advanced-stage blindness due to retinal degenerative diseases, such as retinitis pigmentosa. The technology is based on discoveries by researcher and developer Sheila Nirenberg, a professor at Weill Medical College of Cornell University and the founder of Bionic Sight. She unraveled the code the retina uses to tell the brain what a person is seeing.

Nirenberg has won numerous awards for her work, including a MacArthur Genius Award. She and Bionic Sight are using it to develop a new approach for treating blindness.

“Lighthouse Guild’s mission includes both providing exceptional services today for people who are visually impaired and creating a future of unlimited potential for our clients and patients,” said Calvin Roberts, president and CEO of Lighthouse Guild. “By investing in breakthrough technologies and therapies, Lighthouse Guild can help impact the direction of medical innovation.”

“Lighthouse Guild and Bionic Sight have a shared commitment to utilizing technology to transform the lives of people who are blind or visually impaired,” Nirenberg said. “Our goals are naturally aligned. Through this partnership, we will be able to continue exploring and implementing innovative approaches and treatments.”
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The 10th day of the month prior to publication

**NASA MISSION**
Continued from page 12

part of the tour was feeling the material of the astronaut’s suit,” he said.

From the Artemis command center at Mission Control, he communicated directly with Alexa, asking questions about the mission and giving commands.

Some of the questions included asking Alexa how many miles away Orion was from Earth and how fast the rocket was traveling. He also commanded Alexa to change the light within the spacecraft to green and got Alexa to recite a fun space rap.

“It was a truly emotional experience,” said Cho. “I felt, WOW. I got to be one of three people in the whole world, in the whole country that talk to Alexa while she was in space.”

Talking about the experience, he explained, “It just feels like I’m in a totally different world, like I’m in outer space. It’s just a wonderful opportunity. I feel that being part of this, listening to everything as a visually impaired person, it reminds me just how far technology has come and what’s in store in the future."

The first Artemis mission ended on Dec. 11 when it splashed down off the coast of San Diego.

**RESCUE PLAN**
Continued from page 3

individuals who are homeless and have mental health challenges in the back wards of hospitals, let’s have a common-sense approach that does not criminalize mental health while still ensuring people feel safe in their communities.”

According to New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS), “We cannot hospitalize ourselves out of the problems faced by the mentally ill, nor can we force more people into the same services that have already repeatedly failed them.”

“Why is it that when someone has a medical issue an ambulance comes to help, but when you have a mental health issue, the police get involved?” asked Jalyn Radziminski of the Bazelon Center of Mental Health Law.

“Mental health systems should provide services that help people avoid the attention of the police, and mental health workers, not the police, should engage people in connecting to the community-based services they want. Not only is this safer and more effective, but it also advances civil rights and avoids incarceration, institutionalization, and coercion.”

for students with and without disabilities, including those in temporary housing or in the foster system. PIST NYC advises on day to day school bus route complaints while organizing for a School Bus Bill of Rights referendum.

We believe transportation to school is a civil and human right, and that a decision-making body which includes the most affected communities can do a better job of attracting workers, improving routes, training and communication, and keeping everyone safe,” said Catalinotto. “We support good union contracts, better training, employee protection provisions, and a fair wage structure for those who transport our children.”
SABA has announced the names of the 10 athletes chosen for the first-ever USA Blind Soccer Men’s National Team that will begin international competition in 2023. This is the first step on the journey to competing at the Los Angeles 2028 Paralympic Games.

The team was named after a four-day selection camp held in Chula Vista, Calif. The roster features eight athletes with visual impairments along with two sighted goalkeepers. The eight athletes with visual impairments named to the team are Noah Beckman (Columbus, Ohio), Cody Kirchner (Columbia, S.C.), Ahmed Shareef (Staten Island, N.Y.), Ricardo Castaneda (Fort Worth, Texas), Kevin Brown (Pallis Church, Va.), Antoine Craig (Richmond, Va.), David Brown (Chula Vista, Calif.) and Alvaro Mora Arellano (Phoenix, Ariz.).

The two sighted goalkeepers selected are Brandt Herron (Palm Coast, Fla.) and Kyle Knott (Brevard, N.C.).

Senior Sofia Lopez, 17, not only led her team from the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind recently to the High School Goalball National Championships, but she was also named Most Outstanding Player in the girls’ competition, despite not scoring a single goal from her center position.

She was chosen because her performance exemplifies how a center can be instrumental to their team’s success without being the leading scorer. “Being at center I am more like the quarterback of the team,” said Lopez. “There is no need for me to be the one to score all the goals. I think my main job at center is to lead our team and defend anything that comes our way. I think just being supportive and positive is what really helped me win the title of MVP.”

This was Lopez’s second national championship, but she has been playing goalball since the age of six. This year’s experience has bolstered her outlook on where the sport could take her. “I never thought there was a future for me in goalball, but after this year’s nationals, I feel like all these opportunities are coming up and there is no way I can turn them down,” she said.

If everything goes to plan I will be traveling next summer for a tournament, and maybe I’ll even consider training and practicing to get to the Paralympic levels.”