

# 2018 - 2019 Annual Report



Western New York Independent Living, Inc.  
**2018-2019 Annual Report**  
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## **Vision Statement**

Western New York Independent Living, Inc. family of agencies is a catalyst for systems and individual change, enhancing the quality of life for people with disabilities while respecting diversity and promoting choice and alternatives for independent living in our societies.

## **Mission Statement**

Western New York Independent Living, Inc. is a multi-cultural, grassroots, peer directed, civil rights organization that provides a full range of assistance, programs, and services to enhance the quality of life for all individuals with disabilities.

## **History**

Born in the nationwide independent living and civil rights movement, college students with disabilities who were fed up with discrimination and the lack of access for people with disabilities, decided to make their own opportunities and assist their peers to do the same. In 1979 "The Independents," a group of students with disabilities at the State University of New York at Buffalo, investigated the independent living movement and began operating what was then known as Western New York Independent Living Project (WNYILP). The agency was awarded a Federal Title VII grant in 1980 and opened its own facility early in 1981.



**The Independent Living Center of Erie County (ILC):** provides Independent Living's 5 Core Services: Peer Services, Advocacy, Information and Referral, Independent Living Skills and Transition Services. ILC also provides Educational Navigation, Student Services, NY Connects Information and Referral, Housing Subsidies, and Benefits Application Assistance to individuals in Erie County.

**Independent Living of Genesee County (ILGR):** is a community pathway for an empowered life for people with disabilities by providing Independent Living Skills, Advocacy, Information and Referral, Peer Counseling, Transition Services and Financial Advisement in Genesee, Orleans and Wyoming Counties.

**Independent Living of Niagara County (ILNC):** is an independent living center that provides the five core services of Peer Counseling, Independent Living Skills, Advocacy, Transition Services and Information and Referral which empower people with disabilities on both the individual and community level.

**Mental Health PEER Connection (MHPC):** provides institutional, community and vocational-based services assisting consumers in their recovery process.

**Independence Express (IE):** WNYIL operates fee-based and funded transportation services to help people with disabilities to participate in full inclusion throughout Western New York. Transportation is available for individuals in Erie, Niagara, Genesee, Orleans and Wyoming Counties.

**Taking Control (TC) Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Service (CDPAS):** where individuals who are eligible to receive third party payer services can arrange to have WNYIL act as their Fiscal Intermediary providing recruitment assistance, PA Orientation, Consumer training, payroll and Human Resource assistance, as the Consumer or their Directing Representative, manages their own in-home care.



## **Executive Committee**

Paul D. Beakman, Sr. (President); Richard Dread, (Vice President); Richard Koch, CPA (Treasurer); Sue Ann Sehl (Secretary).

## **Board Members**

Matt Carlucci; Barbara Gaetano; Ellen Lawson; Donald Le Ber; Michael May; Gary Paruta; Juan Santiago; Miguel Santos; John Schappacher; Ann L. Scherff; Chantele Thompson.

## **Independent Living of the Genesee Region Council**

Ann Scherff (Chair); Kelly March (Vice Chair); Ida Caldwell (Treasurer); Erycka Kosinski (Secretary); Linda Makson; Jonathan Doherty.

## **Mental Health PEER Connection Council**

Donald LeBer (Chair); Bobby Jo Meyer (Secretary / Treasurer); Noel Young; Lawrence Nowell; Nafisa Ahmed, Judy Capan, Benjamin Woodrow.

## **Independent Living of Niagara County Council**

Paul Beakman (Chair); John Schappacher (Vice-Chair); Barbara Gaetano (Secretary / Treasurer); Lana Redell; Darren Sneed; Gracie Chambers; Brigid Dillman; Darlene Cutonilli; Megan Dimond.

## Message from the President of the Board of Directors

Welcome everyone, to the 2018-2019 version of the Western New York Independent Living, Inc. Annual Report. It is with bittersweet feelings that I am presenting this message instead of our decades-long leader **Dennis Kessel**, who passed away this past year. Fortunately, I have had the pleasure of working side-by-side with Dennis for just over 30 years, when he took the helm of the Board of Directors and was our leader through dozens of great and memorable years. I hope that my tenure as President of WNYIL can result in the same kind of growth, impact, and change as Dennis' has.

Unfortunately, I must open this message with more bad news, that being the loss of one of the original team, and our chief founder, **Anthony "Tony" Serra**. Tony was WNYIL's first Executive Director, and not only did he kick-start the Agency here in Buffalo/Erie County, he was also the spearhead of the former Independent Living Center in Niagara Falls, the Niagara Frontier Center for Independent Living (NFCIL). The loss of these two dedicated leaders in Western New York's disability movement is deeply felt, and their leadership will not be forgotten.

It is now time for us at the WNYIL to demonstrate the Center's resiliency, and move forward by taking up the Independent Living (IL) mantle and working as hard as we can to insure that people with any kind of disability can live, work, and engage equally in our community.

Let's look at my own personal favorite WNYIL family member, **Independent Living of Niagara County**, (I am proud to say I was one of its charter Council members); ILNC has continued to break new ground in bringing the peer-recipient movement into Niagara County. Its **Addict-2-Addict** program continues to network throughout the County, encouraging, showing, and assisting people who are ready to explore recovery. ILNC can also boast that it has the only Certified deaf American Sign Language (ASL) peer, who also happens to be a Certified Benefits adviser and can work one-on-one with peers who are seeking their paths to recovery.

Now, looking east, there is **Independent Living of the Genesee Region** continuing to demonstrate its leadership by increasing efforts in helping the homeless. Over the last three years, the programs that ILGR offers for

people finding themselves without a place to live, have tripled, assisting dozens of people to “get back into the game”. Not only is the direct service for the homeless growing, ILGR’s **Taking Control** program continues to expand. TC-ILGR has expanded its Consumer-Directed Personal Assistance Services through contractual agreement with Genesee County, and its program is now servicing over 100 consumers, who not only supervise their own homecare, but manage their own workforce, overseeing the people who assist them while they live in the home of their choice. But before I move on, I should point out that the ILGR has increased their reach in the Genesee Region by opening a satellite office in the town of Warsaw, making it easier for folks in Wyoming County to find and access IL Services.

Now turning back to the home that Tony and Dennis built, the original **Independent Living Center** (ILC) in Western New York, there is all kinds of activity. We have counselors working directly with institutionalized individuals who want to get out of nursing homes and similar facilities, our staff finding funds to make that a reality. Our Educational Advocate continues to work with families to provide supportive services to make sure that the child with the disability gets an appropriate first-class education. Like its sister Centers for Independent Living, ILC enables consumers to access the five core services of Information & Referral, Peer Counseling, Independent Living Skills, Advocacy, and Transition (from school to work, vocational training, or higher education), as well.

Working side-by-side with the ILC, (and, in fact, on the same hallway), is Erie County’s oldest and best Peer-run agency, **Mental Health PEER Connection**, providing a variety of supportive programming for County residents who have a mental health diagnosis. Among them are: employment services; home and community-based waiver services, benefits advisement, Wellness Recovery Action Plans (WRAPs), In-hospital peer support [Erie County Medical Center (ECMC) and Buffalo Psychiatric Center (BPC)], Mental Health Court peer support, **Addict-2-Addict** programming, and, our newest and brightest adventure, **The Renewal Center**. At TRC, we offer people an alternative to hospitalization, and assist them to work through stressful events in their lives.

Now, any other President of a non-profit organization would stop there and be proud of these outstanding programs and services, but I shall continue:



The WNYIL Family of Agencies also provides:

Dedicated staff to work on public policy, knowledgeable **Systems Advocates** who assist dozens of businesses, community leaders, and people with disabilities to eliminate attitudinal, communication, physical, transportation, employment, social, health care, and citizenship barriers, that prevent people with disabilities from participating fully.

**Health Home Care Coordination** for people with Behavioral or mental health disabilities, chronic health conditions or HIV, who would like assistance and guidance in developing a health plan that not only includes the medical team but will work with the social determinates of life that impact on good health.

**New York Connects**, a WNYIL-coordinated effort partnered with 19 Counties' Offices of the Aging and four sister Independent living Centers, for providing Information & Referral in seeking programs and services to assist people with disabilities in finding ways to continue to live in the home of their choice.

**Medicaid Application Assistance Program (MAAP)** working with four Independent Living Centers, assisting hundreds of people in 14 Counties of New York State to enroll in healthcare.

**Independence Express**, a wheelchair transportation service that is far less expensive than others in the area and is not restricted in providing service to those who are within a set distance from the nearest Metro Bus route.

**Taking Control**, our **Consumer-Directed Personal Assistant Service**, working side-by-side with two sister Centers (Messina and Jamestown ILCs), is providing Fiscal Intermediary services to almost 1,900 consumers, providing various levels of employment to over 2,700 Personal Assistants in a 16-County area of New York State.

So, it's now time for me to introduce our newest Family member, the **Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service (NFRRS)**, where hundreds of volunteers relate all that is fit to read from periodicals and books to our brothers and sisters who are "print-impaired", seven days per week, 24 hours per day. We look forward to a variety of changes with this valuable

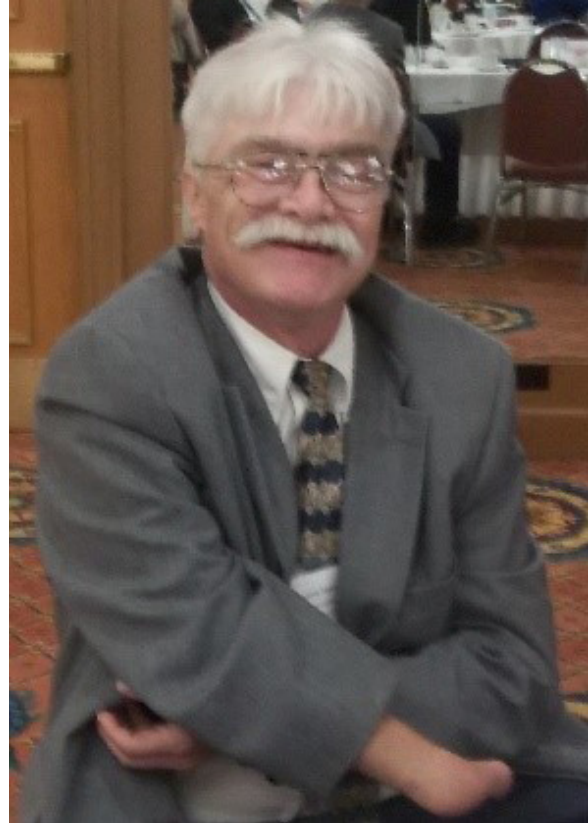
service. Our plans are to upgrade the facility, improve the technology, and bust into the Internet for easier, quicker, and additional options to access the material that people with reading disabilities choose to read.

In closing, I would like to thank the people behind the scenes that make all this look easy. That is, our support team of maintenance, Intake, Intelligence Technology, Accounting, Human Resources and Corporate Compliance teams, Community Engagement, and the administrative staff. All of whom are responsible for making Western New York Independent Living, a true Family of agencies working hard to ensure that all people with disabilities have an equal choice to live in their neighborhoods, work in our communities, and engage without barriers in society.

Paul D. Beakman, Sr.  
President, WNYIL Board of Directors



## Report of the Chief Executive Officer



This past year, the Western New York Independent Living Family of Agencies (WNYIL) was hit hard with the loss of its chief founder **Anthony (Tony) Serra**, and its long time President of the Board of Directors (having served in that position for an unprecedented 30 years) **Dennis M. Kessel**, both of whom lived a lifetime with a disability, Tony since the age of 16, and Dennis since birth.

For decades, these two men struggled to succeed in a world that had not yet embraced the value of accessibility, in a nation that did not have laws that prevented exclusion simply because of a functional limitation. However, despite this cruel reality that did not equally permit those with impairments to enjoy full participation in our society, both Dennis and Tony excelled in their lives. The efforts of these two leaders in Western New York's disability rights movement were able to help make positive changes for the hundreds -- if not thousands -- of the lives of those that came after them. The results: providing equal opportunities for consumers and creating or developing an organization to foster and implement those changes. That organization is WNYIL, the house that Dennis and Tony built, which now



employs hundreds of New Yorkers, most of them consumers themselves, who are working to insure equal rights for other people with disabilities regardless of what neighborhood they come from, what job they do or don't have, and where on the economic spectrum they live.

Let's think about the significance of this for a moment... What makes WNYIL different from other organizations that hire people with disabilities? .... Why is WNYIL unique compared to any other organization that provides services for individuals with impairments? .... To be blunt, what is the "big deal" of WNYIL when it comes to the people they serve or assist?

You might say that the difference -- is our difference! The fact that the WNYIL Family of Agencies is a unified microcosm of what we all want our society to be .... that place that gets its strength from our people, who all bring something unique to our efforts.

If you were to walk (or roll or whatever) down the halls of any of the WNYIL facilities, you would see: People with different disabilities working together to remove community barriers that prevent full inclusion....

Women and men from Western New York's many constituent communities assisting their brothers and sisters in identifying and enjoying the unanticipated choices and opportunities open to them....

You would witness ex-offenders, people of all ages with a history of felonious activity, working side-by-side with people with pristine backgrounds, in order to empower others to take control of their lives.

*What **won't** you see?* You would not see a class distinction between those with and those without disabilities. You would not hear how a person's choice needs to be diminished to conform to an obsolete medical model that happens to be funded. You will not feel as if nobody is listening to your concerns, issues and problems; instead, at WNYIL, we are proud to declare to all, "our consumers are us, because we are them". Our values permeate the environment of our Agency. We live and breathe the walk and talk the talk. We don't "go home and leave it at the office". Our will to seek change for our constituency begins with our By-Laws, which require that over 50% of our Board of Directors must be individuals with limitations, that our department leadership must also have a majority of consumers with

impairments, and, most of all, our dedicated staff must be primarily people with disabilities.

Why such an emphasis on the person with a disability? Because you, the consumers, need a home that provides comfort, understanding, and guidance. Here at WNYIL, you will see that **you matter**, that your disability is just a characteristic that you have, and **not** the person you are. We educate to enable you to live more successfully with your disability, learning how not to let it get in your way of having a self-directing life full of opportunities and choice. We want to empower you to take control of those decisions that will effect you in life; so that when you look back and reflect on what you have done; you too can be as proud as Dennis and Tony were, when they considered their lives and knew that they had made a difference. Even if it's just in your own life, knowing that you met the struggles of living, you won a few and lost a few, but ultimately, you are all the richer.

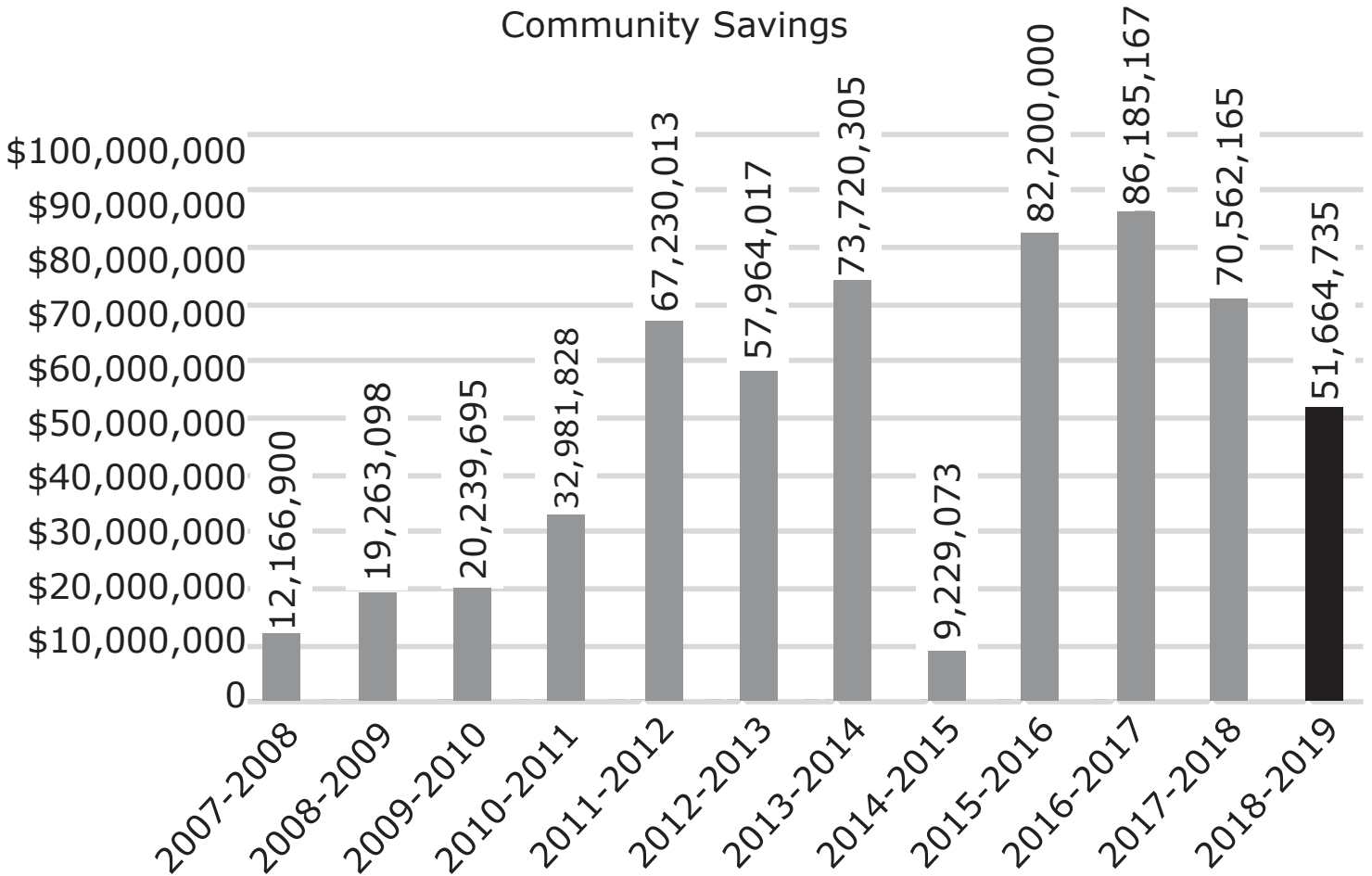
So, please read on and reflect with us from the WNYIL Family of Agencies, taking pride in what we've done together, and realizing that, if you are reading this Annual Report, you too have had a part in change for the better.

Douglas J. Usiak  
Chief Executive Officer

# WNYIL's Work Good for Consumers AND Good for New York State

**\$583,406,996!**

That is how much money in Medicaid payments the WNYIL Family of Agencies saved New York State taxpayers the past ten years by keeping people in their homes instead of being admitted to nursing homes, group homes, and other institutionalized settings.







### **ILC Vignette – “Toni”- MS - IL**

“Toni” a 35-year-old woman, who was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis and must use a wheelchair, came to WNYIL’s Independent Living Center looking for assistance in finding independent housing. She had just finished a bachelor’s Program in Psychology at the State University College at Buffalo (Buffalo State); but while working diligently on her degree, Toni was not able to attend to both school and physical therapy at the same time. No longer able to care for herself on her own, she had been forced to move back home with her parents. Although she stresses that she loves her parents, she feels that they spend too much time being condescending as they try to “Parent” her.

While waiting for an appropriate independent living apartment to become available, her independent living specialist (ILS) learned about a part-time job for which Toni had the qualifications, called her and asked if she was interested in pursuing an employment goal. Toni’s response was “I can’t even get out of bed on my own, I don’t think I would be able to work.” The ILS suggested she at least apply, interview for the job and see if she might be able to do it. She agreed to apply, had the interview, was hired for the job, and has been employed for three months. Prior to this position, she could not stand without assistance, but Toni recently took pride in showing her coworkers that she is now able to stand, and she wants to work towards the capability of walking again. She credits her increase in strength to the necessity of getting up each morning, dressing, and getting moving, as compared to staying in bed and allowing her body to further atrophy. She is still working towards her housing goal, and is considering seeking a Master’s

Degree at the University at Buffalo, but her parents feel less need to “Parent” her, now that she is becoming more and more independent every day.

### **ILC Vignette “Sandra” Housing**

“Sandra” is an 83-year-old African American female who has multiple disabilities, including: low vision, mental health issues, and a mobility impairment, which requires that she use a wheelchair. Sandra was referred by Humboldt House Rehabilitation and Nursing Center to work with the Open Doors Transition Center and Olmstead Housing Subsidy program (OHS).

A resident of Humboldt House since March 3, 2010, Sandra sought transitional services in preparation to live in the community from Open Doors in 2017 and began working with the Independent Living Center (ILC)’s Olmstead Housing Specialist in September 2018. Our staff member provided assistance in obtaining the required documentation for program eligibility and help in completing housing applications. She was approved on November 2, 2018.

In May 2019, we learned that a unit was available in Austin Manor Apartments, a facility in Buffalo’s Black Rock area operated by the Olmsted Center for Sight, which provides housing to individuals who are visually impaired and/or physically disabled. Sandra signed her lease on June 15, 2019 and moved in on September 16th. Now receiving personal care services and informal support from her daughter, Sandra is content to be living in the community after residing in an institution for nine years. The ILC was gratified to be able to instill hope in, and support for, Sandra, so she could achieve her goal of living independently in the community.

### **ILC Vignette “Mary” - Housing**

A 41-year-old female who is developmentally disabled with a diagnosis of Cerebral Palsy, “Mary” relies on a motorized wheelchair for mobility purposes. In March 2019, after Mary and her husband divorced, she was forced to leave, as the wheelchair-accessible apartment was in his name.

Besides her motorized wheelchair, Mary also requires the assistance of a personal care aide with her activities of daily living, including bathing, cooking, and toileting, to live independently in the community. As, from March through August 2019, Mary was forced to “couch surf”, moving from one friend’s home to another’s, it was a struggle to maintain her staffing.

Also, in March 2019, a friend referred Mary to WNYIL to find a new place to live, so she began working with an Independent Living Specialist (ILS) to locate housing. But, two months later, when it was discovered that Mary was eligible for services from the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), she moved over to our Individual Supports and Services (ISS) Coordinator. OPWDD offers an ISS Housing Subsidy, which can provide monthly rental assistance and startup funds.

Being accepted in this program would open up a whole group of apartments that Mary could not previously afford, so our ISS Coordinator submitted Mary’s request for ISS rental subsidy funds to OPWDD -- but her request was denied. Furthermore, she was told that the only reason they might approve a second request for startup funds would be if the housing situation is a health and safety issue for the consumer.

Advocating on Mary’s behalf with OPWDD, our ISS Coordinator demonstrated that Mary’s housing situation was, indeed, a health and safety issue. She had run out of places to “couch surf” and would become homeless if she did not obtain the rental assistance funds. Homeless people who use wheelchairs have few options; they are typically put up in a hotel by the County Department of Social Services or end up in the hospital. As they are not allowed to work in a homeless situation, her personal care aides could no longer serve her. This would be devastating for Mary, because she relies on her aides for daily living skills to continue living in the community.

Finally, Mary’s request for ISS rental subsidy funds was approved, which enabled her to move into her new wheelchair-accessible apartment in August 2019.

## **NY Connects Vignette “Robert” Own business**

“Robert”, an individual whose disability required that he live with family members, was struggling to get out on his own. He had dreams of opening his own business, enabling him to pursue a cause about which he was passionate and for which he had an aptitude. He sought the assistance of New York Connects at WNYIL, and we enrolled him in New York State’s Adult Career and Continuing Educational Services – Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) program, thereby assisting him to take concrete steps toward his objectives. He has begun the process of starting his business and working towards achieving his employment goals.



## Annual Report 2018-2019 WNYIL Statistics

**Total Number of Consumers Served:** 3557

### **Number of Consumers by Age:**

Under 5 years old: 4  
Ages 5-19: 125  
Ages 20-24: 138  
Ages 25-59: 1450  
Age 60 and older: 1837  
Age unavailable: 3

### **Number of Consumers by Gender:**

Female: 2151  
Male: 1401  
Unavailable: 5

### **Number of Consumers by Race and Ethnicity:**

American Indian or Alaska Native: 94  
Asian: 84  
Black or African American: 982  
Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: 4  
White: 2086  
Hispanic or Latino: 200  
Two or More Races: 14  
Race / Ethnicity unavailable: 93

### **Number of Consumers by Disability\*:**

Cognitive: 1047  
Mental / Emotional: 1896  
Physical: 3367  
Sensory (hearing, vision, etc.): 1236  
Multiple Disabilities: 2126

\*Some consumers may have indicated more than 1 disability category.



## **Number of Consumers by County of Residence:**

Albany: 2  
Allegany: 92  
Bronx: 2  
Cattaraugus: 85  
Chautauqua: 90  
Clinton: 91  
Erie: 4901  
Essex: 10  
Franklin: 91  
Genesee: 66  
Jefferson: 66  
Lewis: 7  
Monroe: 20  
Montgomery: 1  
New York: 2  
Niagara: 335  
Onondaga: 1  
Orleans: 29  
Oswego: 1  
Seneca: 2  
St. Lawrence: 135  
Westchester: 1  
Wyoming: 17  
Outside of NY: 6

\*County numbers include consumers with disabilities as well as casual contacts and information and referral for people with and without disabilities

## **Number of Consumers by Veteran Status:**

Veteran (served in US military): 179  
Non-veteran (never served in US military): 3280  
Status unavailable: 98

## **Number of Consumers by Services Received\*:**

Advocacy / legal services: 370  
Architectural barrier services: 4  
Assistive devices/equipment: 13  
Children's services: 1  
Communication services: 117  
Counseling services: 114  
Family services: 4  
Housing and shelter services: 374  
Information and referral services: 4044  
IL skill development and life skills services: 209  
Mobility training services: 12  
Peer counseling services: 833  
Personal assistance services: 1102  
Recreational services: 10  
Transportation services: 241  
Youth services: 10  
Vocational services: 232  
Plan for the achievement of self support services: 3  
Business / Industry / Agency Services: 5  
Benefits advisement services: 1533  
Voter registration services: 1

\*Some consumers may have received more than 1 service.

**Number of Businesses/Agencies Served: 31**

**Western New York Independent Living, Inc. and Affiliate**  
**Statements of Financial Position September 30, 2019 and 2018**

<b><u>Assets</u></b>	<b><u>2019</u></b>	<b><u>2018</u></b>
Current assets:		
Cash and equivalents	\$ 6,728,542	2,479,859
Contracts and fees receivable, net (note 3)	11,797,514	10,254,546
Prepaid insurance and expenses	47,348	22,628
Investments-non marketable securities (note 4)	<u>18,586</u>	<u>18,586</u>
Total current assets	<u>18,591,990</u>	<u>12,775,619</u>
Property and equipment, at cost:		
Leasehold improvements	2,476,465	1,824,112
Office equipment	491,130	401,473
Vans and related equipment	288,609	288,609
Computers and related equipment	<u>576,573</u>	<u>269,740</u>
	3,832,777	2,783,934
Less accumulated depreciation	<u>(2,660,072)</u>	<u>(1,958,927)</u>
Net property and equipment	<u>1,172,705</u>	<u>825,007</u>
Other asset - security deposits	<u>12,622</u>	<u>11,230</u>
	<u>\$19,777,317</u>	<u>13,611,856</u>

**Liabilities and Net Assets**

Current liabilities:		
Accounts payable	513,291	442,525
Deferred revenue (note 5)	3,907,828	1,374,587
Accrued salaries (note 6)	1,763,943	1,655,512
Accrued expenses	367,865	352,738
Estimated third party payor settlement	<u>—</u>	<u>49,704</u>
Total current liabilities	6,552,927	3,875,066
Net assets without donor restrictions	13,224,390	9,736,790
Commitments (note 9)		
Total liabilities and net assets	<u>\$ 19,777,317</u>	<u>13,611,856</u>

See accompanying notes to financial statements.

**Western New York Independent Living, Inc. and Affiliate**  
**Statements of Activities September 30, 2019 and 2018**

	<b><u>2019</u></b>	<b><u>2018</u></b>
Revenue:		
Contracts and grants	\$ 6,407,437	5,823,899
Consumer directed personal assistant services	44,388,880	38,595,609
Fees for services	748,057	1,118,736
Contributions and membership	4,599	1,861
Fundraising	64,443	56,609
Investment income	49,184	6,889
Other revenue	<u>27,994</u>	<u>32,358</u>
Total revenue	<u>51,690,594</u>	<u>45,635,961</u>
Expenses:		
Program services	45,029,891	38,533,774
Management and general	<u>3,272,880</u>	<u>4,244,021</u>
Total expenses	<u>48,302,771</u>	<u>42,777,795</u>
Change in net assets without donor restrictions before third party payor recoupment	3,387,823	2,858,166
Third party payor recoupment	<u>—</u>	<u>(49,704)</u>
Change in net assets without donor restrictions after third party payor recoupment	3,387,823	2,808,462
Net assets without donor restrictions at beginning of year	9,736,790	6,928,328
Transfer of net assets without donor restrictions from Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service, Inc.	<u>99,777</u>	<u>—</u>
Net assets without donor restrictions at end of year	<u>\$ 13,224,390</u>	<u>9,736,790</u>

See accompanying notes to financial statements.



## Mental Health PEER Connection Director's Report

In 2019, Mental Health Peer Connection rolled in another year of thriving in the community as it has done since 1997. WE continue to assist people with major mental health issues out of institutions, providing a pathway to meaningful and continual employment, and improving people's lives, as they determine. WE are an evidence-based "practice," that continues to make the playing field of life for those with serious mental illness equal and inclusive.

This past year, assisting people obtain and maintain real employment, resulted in 20% of the 330 people setting employment as a goal to obtain it. 98% of the guests at the Renewal Center were diverted from crisis and admission to the Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program at Erie County Medical Center. 60% of 518 people with serious mental illness who wanted to improve their life did so. And close to 2,000 individuals were given the message of Hope in their battle with addiction. MHPC is always under the belief that if we just assist one person in their recovery it has been worth it. But MHPC has assisted thousands. And this isn't the first year, WE have been doing it for the past 22 years.

However, many people in our community do not grasp the idea that WE are an alternative form of recovery from serious mental illness. This alternative works! It is not driven as a business or medical model of treating mental illness, it is an agency driven by a sharing, empowering, and equal, way of life.

WE are no fad alternative to dealing with serious mental illness, WE are mainstream for thousands in Erie County. WE do this because WE are the



people WE serve. WE struggle and have serious mental illness. WE openly share and are truthful about this torturous affliction. WE are also truthful in our relationships with the people WE serve. Many of us received services at MHPC ourselves. Staff at the agency have gotten us out of hospitals, into homes, with loved ones, and to be successful in our lives. Then, WE help the ones who have the same or similar experiences with their recovery. It is because of this that WE call ourselves "Agents of Change". Not only with ourselves but with people who receive our services in our Community. That being "PEER SERVICES". WE are not just staff, WE are administration, WE are MHPC Council, WE are WNYIL Board of Directors. WE are Us, WE are Them. The following is written by Kevin Smith, MHPC Assistant Director:

Change is something that is always occurring, it's constant. Change affects us all and the world we live in. It's not always pleasant. Many of us are resistant because we question if it's for the "better," or we are just afraid. I didn't have a clue.

I remember when I first walked through the doors of Mental Health Peer Connection. I was hesitant, unsure, and tired even. I was guarding the secrets that I eventually learned were keeping me sick. In my head this was just another stop amongst many. Another place where people I didn't know were tasked with "fixing" me. Then I met a someone, a staff member. Let's just call him Blane. It quickly became evident to me he was not a clinician at least he didn't talk like one. He began telling me a little bit about himself, challenges in his life and his mental health. I cut him short and let him know I did not need a friend. To my surprise he responded with, "neither do I."

Something happened in that exchange. I wasn't sure if it was hearing a snippet of his story that vaguely mirrored my own or the fact that he met me right where I was in the moment. But I came back. I needed to know more about this change in the way people were helping each other.

I learned about choices, and wellness being about the individual. I learned my wellness was about the journey and not the destination. But, more importantly I learned that I was in control and I could get help from people like myself, people who'd been there.

It was these relationships, relationships like I'd never experienced before, that sparked a change in my life. A change that was about giving and receiving, a reciprocal change. That was 17 years ago I walked through them doors. And now it's not about me. I can't count the number of lives MHPC has changed for the better since then. Whether it was ECMC, Buffalo Psychiatric Center, Crisis Services, or someone walking in off the streets it did not matter where they were or where they were coming from, MHPC was willing to help make a positive change. Like I said in the beginning "I didn't have a clue."

Maura Kelley  
Director of MHPC



### **MHPC Vignette - "Megan K" Addiction recovery**

"Megan K" is a 30-year-old woman with a long history of substance abuse and homelessness. Brought into the hospital in November of 2018, due to an opiate overdose, she was not entirely ready to change her ways, but, speaking with Mental Health PEER Connection (MHPC)'s Addict 2 Addict, Family 2 Family (A2A) Peer, Megan was told that when she was ready, we would be here to help. Megan came back for treatment in July of 2019 and began striving towards a goal of abstinence from drugs and alcohol. She entered a detoxification program, and then inpatient rehabilitation in ARIS and completed both successfully. She shared her experiences during her Addict 2 Addict support groups and became fully engaged in her program of recovery. After leaving inpatient, she then went into a halfway house, and currently runs self-help meetings there Wednesday nights, which has helped her find her voice again. She is doing well and maintaining her sobriety.

### **MHPC Vignette – "SJ, Jr." – Housing, employment**

A 41-year-old African American man who was being treated for Major Depression, "SJ, Jr." was a consumer of MHPC services for about 8 months. His first priority was to deal with being unemployed and homeless. While staying in the Buffalo City Mission; he had applied for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and his denial was a source of stress. However, MHPC staff discussed his options, he was connected to a lawyer, appealed the decision, and won his case. After staff helped him to find a listing of apartments for rent, SJ applied for several and, with help from housing assistance, he finally got one. This success greatly helped his depression. He subsequently obtained a furniture voucher, SJ now has a furnished two-bedroom apartment, and he moved his 28-year-old son in to live with him. SJ recently secured a part-time job, retaining his SSI income, and continues to live independently in his own apartment in the community.

### **MHPC Vignette – "Mr. Hart" - Housing, employment**

An unemployed 45-year-old male who was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), after years of family and street abuse, "Mr. Hart" was being treated in Erie County Medical Center (ECMC), where a MHPC staff member presented our services. On his release, he came to our Agency seeking help finding employment; he owed back child support and was about to lose his apartment. We started in the Job Club, looking for openings on-line and in job publications, and he found a part-time position that helped him meet one of his goals; but he wanted another job that would enable him

to keep his apartment. Together, we were able to find Mr. Hart additional employment not too far from his first job. He is catching up on his child support and, no longer afraid of losing it due to lack of funds, is enjoying his home. He has met his goals and is now linked with Buffalo THRIVE, a development program for underemployed workers run by the United Way and three community partners, which is helping him to maintain his positions and creating new opportunities for him to improve his life further.

### **MHPC Vignette - "Dana" – TRC**

A 43-year-old Caucasian female who has a diagnosis of severe depression and anxiety, "Dana" came to The Renewal Center hospital diversion program describing her crisis as wanting to kill herself. She had formulated a plan and was contemplating carrying out this plan to its conclusion. The consumer stated that the grief that she had been experiencing since her mother's passing, a year prior, had not diminished, and the only solution that occurred to her to end this grief was to end everything. She stated that she had been an inpatient at BryLin Behavioral Health System Hospital four times in the preceding six months.

Dana didn't think that she was a good example for the maturing of her 17-year-old twins and that they would be better off without her at this point. As the TRC Outreach and Community Engagement Peer worked with Dana, it became clear that she had unresolved issues surrounding her formal diagnosis of borderline personality disorder (BPD). The Peer helped Dana follow through her therapist's suggestion of a different type of therapy, and she was thrilled to realize that her therapist was there to help her, rather than hurt her. The staff member encouraged Dana to use the "just for today" slogan while doing her "homework" and carrying out her prescribed medication changes.

Today, Dana is working towards embracing Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), [which combines techniques from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) with core mindfulness concepts to deal with BPD], and she has been consistently appearing for her appointments. She no longer needs to be hospitalized due to her suicidal thoughts.

## Annual Report 2018-2019 MHPC Statistics

### **Crisis Services Mobile Transition Team Program:**

Total individuals enrolled: 201

Percentage of individuals successfully avoided hospitalization for 90 days post discharge: 67%

Percentage of individuals who did present to a hospital (23%) that went on to successfully link to services after a presentation: 16%

Number of individuals who committed suicide: 0

### **Addict to Addict Peer and Family Support Program\*:**

Total number of interactions with individuals presenting with substance use issues: 1978

Total number of individual follow up's completed: 1250

Total number of individual calls responded to within 2 hours: 107

Total number of interactions with families and caregivers of individuals who have substance use issues: 754

Total number of continued support or families and caregivers: 144

Total number of family or caregiver calls responded to within 2 hours: 60

Total number of family support groups: 31

Total number of community presentations regarding family members in relationships with people who have substance use issues: 35

\*Reflects January-December 2019 Data.

### **ECDMH Benefits Advisement, Life Coaching, and Work Support Programs\*:**

Total number of individuals who received benefits advisement services: 317

Total number of individuals served whose qualifying benefits were identified: 258

Total number of individuals who were certified or recertified for benefits: 52

Percentage of eligible employed individuals who maintained work transition benefits: 100%



Total number of individuals who received life coaching services: 536

Total number of individuals who had an improved quality of life: 286

Total number of individuals whose basic needs (housing, financial, mental, physical, wellness) were met: 148

Total number of individuals who completed a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP): 200

Total number of individuals who received work support services: 282

\*Reflects January - December 2019 Data.

### **Enhancement Program:**

Percentage of individuals who obtained employment through the program:  
26.4%





# Independent Living of Niagara County (ILNC)

## Independent Living of Niagara County Director's Report

As a member of the Western New York Family of Agencies, Independent Living of Niagara County (ILNC) had a year of change, transition and transformation in many ways during 2018-2019. Many of the programs that are offered through ILNC experienced a year of growth. Due to participation in numerous outreaches, community-based meetings and events throughout the county, members of the ILNC team forged new and relationships throughout Niagara County.

As a result of the many presentations that were provided and the relationships that have been built, the ILNC team has continued to educate Niagara County on Independent Living Philosophy as well as the many programs that we offer through ILNC including: Health Home Care Coordination, Advocacy, Open Doors - Transition Services, Independent Living Skills, Taking Control - Consumer Directed Personal Attendant Services (CDPAS); Information and Assistance through NY Connects; Certified Peer Recovery Advocacy through Addict 2 Addict Niagara and Services for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing.

### **ILNC Events:**

- **October 2018. ILNC's Meet the Candidates Day** hosted several Niagara County candidates who would be represented on the November ballot.
- **February 2019.** Consumers and Staff from ILNC participated in the **New York Association for Independent Living (NYAIL) Legislator Education Day** in Albany. Visits were made to Senator Robert Ortt, Assemblyman Michael J. Norris, and Assemblyman

Angelo J. Morinello to explain the importance of the local Independent Living Center (ILC), examine the vital issues facing the ILC's and the state, demonstrating the value of consumer choice, the impact of the involvement of the local ILC, and the ways that the consumers feel empowered.

- **May 2019. ILNC's Policymaker's Breakfast** with Guest Speaker Seth Piccirillo, Director of Niagara Falls Community Development, at Antonio's Banquet and Conference Center in Niagara Falls.
- **June 2019. ILNC's Disability Pride Niagara Olmstead Celebration** at Hyde Park in Niagara Falls, saluting the 20th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's Olmstead Decision, was marked by consumer involvement.
- **July 2019.** ILNC Staff and volunteers participated in WNYIL's **Disability Pride Celebration and Parade** at Canalside in Buffalo, NY
- **August 2019. ILNC's 14th Annual Bass Fishing Derby** launched for the second time from the docks of Lewiston. This event attracted 15 anglers from different parts of the region and state, who were accommodated by 5 boat captains. Several family members, friends and community members joined the fun at the Barbeque that followed at the Fin, Feather, and Fur Conservation Club in Lewiston, that number grew to over 60.

Through the advocacy of Independent Living of Niagara County, the following changes were made which resulted in increased accessibility for citizens with disabilities in Niagara County:

- Staff had discussions with Niagara Community College regarding the opportunity to introduce ILNC programs and services as well as IL Philosophy to all students within the Human Services Department.



- ILNC Staff were approached to provide American Sign Language classes to pre-school age children at the Kenan Center.
- Staff signed an interagency agreement to provide support services for Niagara County residents with special needs.
- As a result of the advocacy of ILNC, members of the disability community became members of three different community committees. These included New York State Rehabilitation Council, Accessibility Committee, and Human Rights Commission.

Sarah K. Lanzo  
Director of ILNC



### **ILNC Vignette Woman in crisis**

While ILNC is an Independent Living Center and technically not a crisis services agency, we often work with individuals that are experiencing a crisis. In January 2019, an elderly woman had run out of food and her medications for her Heart disease and Asthma. All of her family is in Nevada and she did not have anyone else, locally, to assist her.

Our Individual Care Coordinator (ICC) arranged for an Independent Living Specialist (ILS) to obtain enough staples from the local food pantry so that she could last until she received her Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP or Food Stamp) benefits. The ICC then spoke with the consumer's medical providers and pharmacy to ensure that she received her medications promptly. As the woman's vehicle was not in good enough repair to make it through winter weather, the ICC went to the individual's pharmacy, picked up her medications, and paid the copay.

While the ICC would not be able to keep up this level of support over the long term, she felt it was the right thing to do. She would not want any of her family members to experience such a crisis and not have anyone to help them.

### **ILNC Vignette "Consumer A" – Housing, employment**

"Consumer A" is a 49-year-old man who is deaf and fluent in American Sign Language. Due to complications from diabetes, he had had to quit his full-time job at Wegmans Food Market and was without health insurance for eight years. Lacking any income to pay his rent, he was evicted and stayed with a friend for a month, but then his friend asked him to leave. He was still in contact with his parents, and they let him stay with them until he received some help.

A friend who had received services from our agency referred Consumer A to Independent Living of Niagara County in 2016. At his request, ILNC staff helped him apply for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Medicaid and Public Assistance, which was secured.

Having gained greater confidence, Consumer A requested our aid in finding his own apartment in order to live independently, and ILNC staff assisted him in applying for several different units. Ultimately, he moved into his own apartment in Lockport, New York.



Furthermore, Consumer A informed the ILNC that he would like to return to work, part-time, so our staff helped him apply to different positions he discovered through Internet searching. Having proudly accepted a part time job as a church Maintenance Man, he is currently living independently in the community.

### **ILNC Vignette "Joe K." - Addiction recovery**

A gentleman that he had been working with at Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center (NFMMC) suggested that "Joe K." contact ILNC's Addict 2 Addict (A2A) hotline in September 2018. When our Peer Support Specialist (PSS) returned his call, Joe stated that he had been struggling with drinking and taking drugs for many years, and spoke about what had been going on in his life and how it led him to where he was then. Over 20 years ago, he used to go to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings and then tried Narcotics Anonymous (NA), but he found they didn't work for him.

Our PSS offered to sit down with Joe, in person, for a cup of coffee, or in whatever venue he preferred, to discuss his needs one-on-one: how he could help Joe with his recovery and become a valuable resource for him. Asked about the steps he took to accomplish his own recovery, our staff person shared with Joe that he found it in NA and, as it happened, his home group's meeting was later that night. There was a moment of silence as Joe contemplated attending. After further conversation, the PSS reminded him that his cell phone would be on, he had the number, and if Joe needed to talk to a peer or he felt like drinking, our staff member would be there to help. Shortly after they hung up, Joe called back, stating, "I was thinking I would like to go to your home group. Is there any way you could help me with that?" The PSS made arrangements to flex his schedule in order to get Joe to that meeting.

Arriving at the location, while still in the parking lot, Joe saw the younger people getting out of their cars and appeared to become uncomfortable and anxious, unsure if he wanted to go into the meeting. Joe even asked the Peer if he was willing to take \$20 to drive him back home at that moment. The PSS queried what Joe had to lose by sitting in this meeting, as opposed to what he could gain from learning what is different from the ones he attended 20 years ago. Joe yielded to this logic, sat next to the PSS, and, by the end of the meeting, he stated that he didn't want that day to end!

Joe has continued to attend NA meetings since that day, receiving his "1 Year Clean" Recovery Medallion in September 2019. In the past year, Joe has had two hip replacements, and, building his foundation, he has been reaching out, sharing with others, and listening to the testimonies of those around him to help him with his recovery. He has reaped many benefits that some recovering addicts never achieve, such as taking family trips with his son and his wife, plus building some genuine friendships. He is always attending meetings, helping newcomers with rides or sharing his experience, strength and hope with them. Joe has taken a strong hold of his own recovery, and made it what it is today, because he was ready!



## Annual Report 2018-2019 ILNC Statistics

**Total Number of Consumers Served: 602**

### **Number of Consumers by Age:**

Under 5 years old: 1  
Ages 5-19: 15  
Ages 20-24: 19  
Ages 25-59: 281  
Age 60 and older: 278  
Age unavailable: 8

### **Number of Consumers by Gender:**

Female: 343  
Male: 256  
Unavailable: 3

### **Number of Consumers by Race and Ethnicity:**

American Indian or Alaska Native: 24  
Asian: 5  
Black or African American: 148  
White: 387  
Hispanic or Latino: 17  
Two or More Races: 1  
Race / Ethnicity unavailable: 20

### **Number of Consumers by Disability\*:**

Cognitive: 319  
Mental/Emotional: 408  
Physical: 970  
Sensory (hearing, vision, etc.): 306  
Multiple Disabilities: 488

\*Some consumers may have indicated more than 1 disability category.

### **Number of Consumers by County of Residence:**

Cattaraugus: 4  
Chautauqua: 2  
Erie: 75

New York: 1  
Niagara: 1200  
Orleans: 1  
Rensselear: 1

\*County numbers include consumers with disabilities as well as casual contacts and information and referral for people with and without disabilities

**Number of Consumers by Veteran Status:**

Veteran (served in US military): 39  
Non-veteran (never served in US military): 552  
Status unavailable: 11

**Number of Consumers by Services Received\*:**

Advocacy / legal services: 35  
Architectural barrier services: 1  
Assistive devices / equipment: 4  
Communication services: 3  
Counseling services: 14  
Family services: 5  
Housing and shelter services: 78  
Information and referral services: 826  
IL skill development and life skills services: 168  
Mobility training: 4  
Peer counseling services: 165  
Personal assistance services: 338  
Recreational services: 2  
Transportation services: 4  
Youth Services: 1  
Vocational services: 26  
Plan for the Achievement of Self Support: 1  
Business / Industry / Agency services: 5  
Benefits advisement services: 109  
Voter Registration: 2

\*Some consumers may have received more than 1 service.

**Number of Businesses / Agencies Served: 136**





## Independent Living of the Genesee Region Director's Report

What's new since last year? In 2019 Independent Living of the Genesee Region moved to a new home. Our main office is now located in newly renovated office space at the Crickler Executive Business Center. We are still on Main Street in Batavia, but now enjoying a large reception area, 14 private offices, with a Multipurpose Room (accommodating up to 50 people) and a smaller Meeting Room. Our services have expanded to include a team of eighteen staff, providing assistance to people with disabilities in the Genesee, Orleans and Wyoming County area. Our satellite office is now located at 2407 Main Street, in Warsaw, and we are open five days a week to serve anyone walking in to see us.

As our space has expanded so have our services. We now conduct the Diabetes and Chronic Disease Self-Management classes in both Genesee and Wyoming Counties at various community sites. New funding has allowed us to train more facilitators and provide these evidence-based workshops which improve the quality of life for participants. The workshops include information on making action plans, eating well, meal planning, stress reduction techniques, and how to effectively communicate with loved ones and medical providers. Each participant receives a resource book, meditation CD, and an incentive gift card for local shopping.

Our Rapid Re-housing program has expanded to include more resources for people with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness. In rural communities it can be difficult to identify homeless individuals and families. Unfortunately, we regularly meet with people who are living in a vehicle or otherwise have no place to stay. Through collaboration with other community and government agencies, we are able to provide rent, security deposits and supportive services. This housing program provides stability to people who are in crisis and assists them with feeling secure again.



This has been a year of record growth and we at Independent Living of the Genesee Region are grateful that our work is making a difference in the community, one person at a time.

Rae Frank  
Director of ILGR



## **ILGR Vignette - Isolated Wyoming County woman**

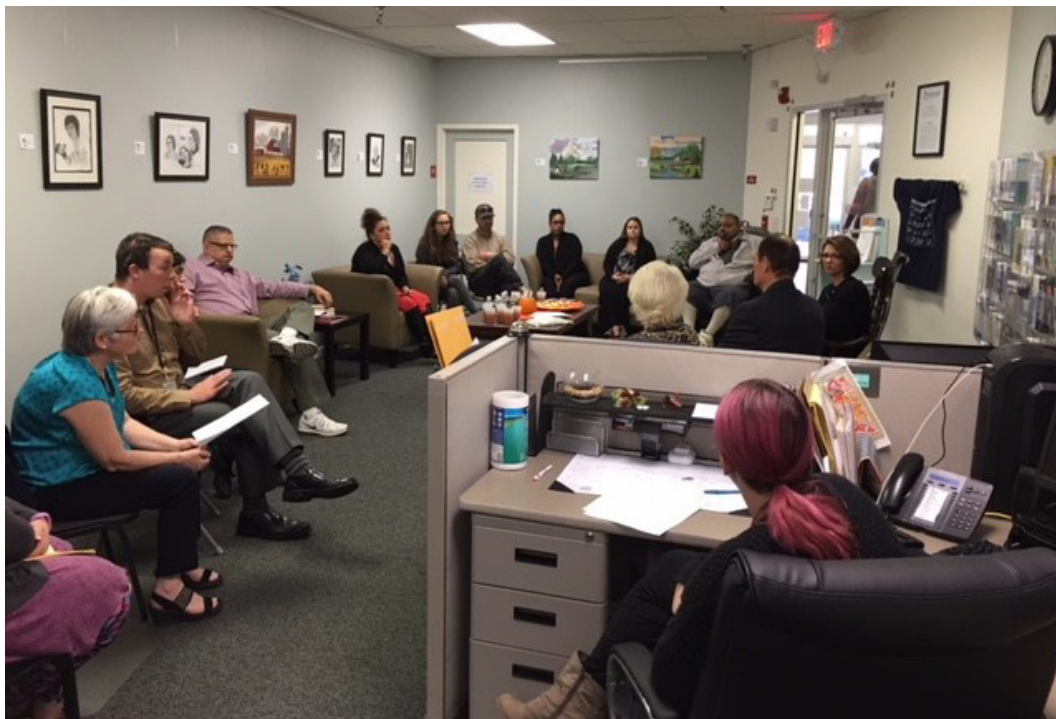
Independent Living of the Genesee Region assisted a woman in Wyoming County with mental health issues that make it difficult for her to meet and talk to people who are not family. It is such a struggle for her to look at bills that she will not open mail for weeks or months. A portion of her mortgage is covered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Housing Loan Program, and she was two months late in completing the recertification paperwork. Dennis of Wyoming County Section 8 Housing Program understood her situation and provided her with ILGR's contact information. "Against her better judgment" because she isn't comfortable around other people, she reached out, our staff member went to her house, and "just being herself", assisted her with completing the paperwork. The consumer was pleased, thanking the staff person for making her feel completely comfortable, listening to her without judging her. At the time, she expressed willingness to reach out to our Agency to assist with paperwork in the future; and since then has sought our help in completing a Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as Food Stamps) application and other paperwork.

## **ILGR Vignette "BF"- Employment**

After moving from a different county to be closer to his loved ones, "BF" needed some assistance in obtaining a job. He has a learning disability and general anxiety disorder, which makes it difficult for BF to perform certain work tasks in a timely manner and to communicate effectively with his employers about requesting accommodations on the job. He came to ILGR for help; after editing his résumé, we spent a month working on increasing his interview and communication skills, until he was much more confident speaking about himself and his work accomplishments and limitations. BF found a suitable job himself, and, with our support, as needed, corresponded with the potential employer, was hired, and has been successfully working there for the last three months. Not only is he much better able to communicate with his employer, but also with our staff, when he needs any ongoing support.

## **ILGR Vignette – “JW” Medicaid application**

“JW” is a person with a disability who is unable to walk. Wyoming County Department of Social Services referred JW to ILGR, as she needed assistance applying for Medicaid for long-term care services. At the time, she was paying out-of-pocket for aide services to be able to remain at home, but there was a limited time frame for the aides to assist her. Also, she was paying for care for a child with a disability who is living at home. They own a van that has a wheelchair lift, but the van keeps breaking down and they both had been missing important medical appointments. ILGR staff was able to help JW apply for Medicaid and she was approved. To qualify, she would have had to undertake a problematic very large spenddown of the savings that had been paying their living expenses. ILGR staff was able to assist her in setting up a pooled trust so she was able to continue living independently, while using Medicaid Transportation Services for her medical appointments. JW has recently begun utilizing ILGR’s Taking Control Consumer-Directed Personal Assistance Services (CDPAS) program for home care, and her daughter has also been accepted into CDPAS.



## Annual Report 2018-2019 ILGR Statistics

**Total Number of Consumers Served:** 959

### **Number of Consumers by Age:**

Under 5 years old: 4

Ages 5-19: 14

Ages 20-24: 28

Ages 25-59: 403

Age 60 and older: 467

Age unavailable: 43

### **Number of Consumers by Gender:**

Female: 576

Male: 382

Gender unavailable: 1

### **Number of Consumers by Race and Ethnicity:**

American Indian or Alaska Native: 15

Asian: 6

Black or African American: 60

White: 837

Hispanic or Latino: 17

Race / Ethnicity Unavailable: 24

### **Number of Consumers by Disability\*:**

Cognitive: 272

Mental / Emotional: 398

Physical: 1038

Sensory (hearing, vision, etc.): 225

Multiple Disabilities: 521

\*Some consumers may have indicated more than 1 disability category.

## **Number of Consumers by County of Residence:**

Cattaraugus: 1

Cayuga: 1

Erie: 20

Genesee: 732

Livingston: 12

Monroe: 8

Niagara: 10

Orleans: 114

Wyoming: 153

\*County numbers include consumers with disabilities as well as casual contacts and information and referral for people with and without disabilities

## **Number of Consumers by Veteran Status:**

Veteran (served in US military): 74

Non-veteran (never served in US military): 849

Status unavailable: 36

## **Number of Consumers by Services Received\*:**

Advocacy / legal services: 179

Architectural barrier services: 1

Assistive devices / equipment: 343

Communication services: 66

Counseling services: 22

Family services: 2

Housing and shelter services: 168

Information and referral services: 245

IL skill development and life skills services: 170

Mobility Training: 1

Peer counseling services: 25

Personal assistance services: 259



Transportation services: 7

Youth services: 1

Vocational services: 42

Plan for the achievement of self support services: 9

Business / Industry / Agency services: 1

Benefits advisement services: 151

Voter Registration: 1

\*Some consumers may have received more than 1 service.

**Number of Businesses / Agencies Served: 0**





## Independence Express Transportation Department Director's Report

WNYIL has been providing transportation for people with disabilities for over 38 years. It started with one van for the agency, with any staff member who was available driving it. Through the years, an actual Transportation Department was formed, developed, and now we have a small fleet of vans, drivers and support staff. Our budget is just over \$400,000 annually and has become a separate department called Independence Express (IE).

IE is currently available to transport people with disabilities in Erie, Niagara, Genesee, Orleans and Wyoming counties from various funding sources. We also provide bus passes to people in Erie and Niagara counties through two programs. We offer Fee-For-Service transportation at a cost of \$15 each way, plus \$.50 per mile traveled. Most of our programs allow people with disabilities to travel wherever they would like in our service area. As always, people receiving services at one of our agencies, attending functions of and attending groups that are sponsored by WNYIL may receive transportation at no cost when available. WNYIL currently has four wheelchair accessible vans and two minivans to serve people with disabilities in WNY.

In the 2018 fiscal year, IE served 152 people, providing 5,064 rides. These individuals either rode on the vans, many of them regularly, or received a bus pass. In the same span of time, our vehicles drove over 160,000 miles throughout the five counties getting people to various destinations of their choice.

In the coming year, we will continue to explore new funding sources to keep providing safe, reliable transportation to people with disabilities throughout WNY.

Cathy Colicchia  
Director of IE

# Health Homes Care Coordination Director's Report

## **Vision:**

Western New York Independent Living Health Homes Care Coordination Department is WNYIL's Care Coordination service that assists, facilitates, and advocates for its members to realize better health and social outcomes through developing and implementing individual care plans that improves one's quality of life.

## **Summary:**

WNYIL currently contracts with four Lead Health Homes in the WNY/Genesee, Orleans, Wyoming (GOW) region. Greater Buffalo United Accountable Health Network (GBUAHN) operating in Erie & Niagara Counties (2 FTE in the ILC Buffalo location). Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center (NFMCC) operating in both Niagara & Erie Counties (1FTE in the ILNC location). Health Homes of Upstate New York Best Self operating in Erie county (2FTE in the ILC Buffalo location) & Health Homes of Upstate New York Huther-Doyle operating in Genesee & Orleans Counties (2FTE in the ILGR location). This provides choice to the individuals we serve here at WNYIL.

What does the Health Home Coordination do and for who? The WNYIL Health Homes Care Coordination Department provides Care Coordination services to ensure all those involved in an individual's care are working together and sharing the necessary information in supporting a person's recovery. A Health Home Care Coordinator is expected to help coordinate not just medical, mental health and substance abuse services, but the social service needs of the individual as well. We Coordinate clients care through effective communication with other providers, Advocate on the client's behalf so they receive the care they deserve, navigate the complex healthcare systems, link client's to resources for finding affordable housing, food, clothing, childcare and transportation, assist client's in learning more about meaningful activities to improve your health and keep you healthy and assist the client in identifying goals and ensure everyone involved in care understands goals and the care plan created, to best help the client reach those goals.

Eligible clients will have one or a combination of the following diagnosis: a significant mental illness, substance use disorder or suffer from chronic health conditions i.e. asthma, diabetes, heart disease.

WNYIL Health Home Services are provided to client's in a convenient location of their choice. This can be in our office, another provider office, in the community or right in the client's home.

Many Medicaid beneficiaries suffer from multiple or severe chronic conditions and benefit from organized coordination and management of the health and long-term services they receive. WNYIL, through Health Home Care Coordination Program's extensive work in applying transformation research and implementation initiatives, has been at the forefront of adopting a person-centered, recovery-focused delivery service model for its client's. Ultimately, making sure its clients get the care and services they need. This may mean fewer trips to the emergency room or less time spent in the hospitals, getting regular care and services from doctors and providers, finding a safe place to live, and finding a way to get to medical appointments.

The WNYIL Health Home Care Coordination Department has within this past year continued to struggle with staff transition including several separations as well as the on-boarding of staff to ensure quality service delivery. We have also undergone several audits from our contracted lead health homes (focused on Plans of Care, documentation, eligibility and consent) which confirmed that we are meeting the standards of service as it relates to service provision. The hard work of the Health Home staff have improved the lives of many of our members. One example that comes to mind is a gentleman that lives with major health issues; limb amputation, severe chronic pain and mental health concerns. This member in the past had been a frequent utilizer of local emergency room visits for severe pain. While the involved health care systems only looked at this individual from the perspective that he was "med seeking" and did not address the underlying issue that was the primary source of the pain. This individual lost faith in the medical community as well as with him self. After intensive intervention on the part of our Health Home Staff including but not limited to attendance at doctor's appointments, navigation of the complex medical system and collaboration among all providers involved the primary source of the pain is now being addressed. This has resulted in less trips to the emergency room, increase in quality of life due to pain management and ultimately giving hope and self-worth back to the individual. I would invite you to stop by and speak with our staff as they also have many stories of success.

Hans Schiffert  
Director of Health Homes Care Coordination  
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## Medicaid Application Assistance Program (MAAP) Director's Report

Funded by the New York State Department of Health (DOH), the Medicaid Application Assistance Program (MAAP) helps individuals who are over 65, certified blind or on Social Security Disability, to apply for Medicaid.

This program was created in 2015 to ensure that people have access to comprehensive, affordable health insurance. We have a team of experienced enrollment staff throughout 14 counties of Western New York who assist consumers with the application process and documentation collection; even hand-delivering the completed application packet to the local Department of Social Services.

In 2019 we helped 1,336 individuals apply for Medicaid coverage.

At the end of 2018, WNYIL also started providing Medicare Application Assistance for individuals who are required to apply for Medicare as a requirement of maintaining their Medicaid insurance coverage. Our Medicare enrollment staff help these individuals with applying for Medicare through the Social Security website.

In 2019 we helped 1,238 individuals apply for Medicare to ensure their Medicaid coverage went uninterrupted.

Ensuring our consumers have medical insurance to cover their medical care and necessities is just one of the ways WNYIL provides the opportunity for them to *Live in our neighborhoods, Work in our communities, and Engage in our society.*

Daniel Colpoys  
Chief Community Engagement Officer



## Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service Director's Report

As you know, on December 1, 2018 the WNY Independent Living Center welcomed the Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service (NFRRS) into the family.

The natural affiliation pairs one of our region's largest and most comprehensive organizations serving the disabled with an organization that's a leader in serving people who are blind, have low vision, or other print disabilities.

Here's a little more about the NFRRS that perhaps you didn't know.

The NFRRS was founded in 1987 to help people who are blind, have low vision, or have other print-related disabilities 'read' printed materials. To accomplish this, volunteers read books, magazines, newspapers and other print materials over-the-air 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These readings are broadcast over a subcarrier radio frequency to listeners who have a special receiver, the broadcast is not available to the general public.

It's clear why people who are blind, have low-vision, or have other vision-related disabilities use the service. But people who are 'print-impaired' are also listeners. These individuals have physical disabilities that make it difficult to hold or turn the pages of a book, magazine or newspaper. WNY has about 20,000 people who are blind or have various vision-related disabilities, but estimates count another 40,000 people who have other physical disabilities that qualify for our service.

More than 120 active volunteers regularly lend their voices to words so that our listeners can get the same benefits from reading as everyone else. They read the Buffalo News live six mornings a week and USA Today live at Noon five days a week. Other materials recorded and broadcast throughout the day include Business First, the NY Times and the Wall Street Journal, local daily & weekly newspapers like the Niagara Gazette, the Jamestown Post-Journal and the Bee's, popular books, magazines and other feature publications.

On January 25, 2020 the NFRRS recognized its 12,000th day on-the-air. In that time about 280,000 hours of material, or the equivalent of more than five million pages of text, has been broadcast. Thousands of Western New Yorkers have benefitted from the service.

Thanks to grants from Facebook and the James F. Cummings Foundation, NFRRS is expanding its service capacity by introducing Podcasts and Live Streaming to its radio audience in early 2020. By adding the Internet to its service portfolio, listeners anywhere in Western New York, or anywhere for that matter, will be able to listen to the programs they want, when they want to, using virtually any Internet-connected device. While radios will continue to be an important tool, we expect to see a ten-fold increase in the number of listeners we'll be able to serve through this new program.

When NFRRS became an affiliate of Western New York Independent Living it began a relationship that brings professional support to the NFRRS for bookkeeping, payroll, IT, maintenance and other needs, allowing the Service to dedicate more attention to strengthening its core mission, improving listener outreach and the program experience, fundraising and volunteer recruitment. The relationship provides WNYIL with additional tools and capabilities for community outreach.

The goals for NFRRS over the next 12 to 24 months are designed to remedy short-term budget needs and stabilize the agency, restore marketing and fundraising functions to a level that meets current and future demands, and introduce live streaming and podcasts to our program options which could expand our listener base ten-fold in that period.

Mike Benzin  
Director of NFRRS

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## **Independent Living Center (ILC)**

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