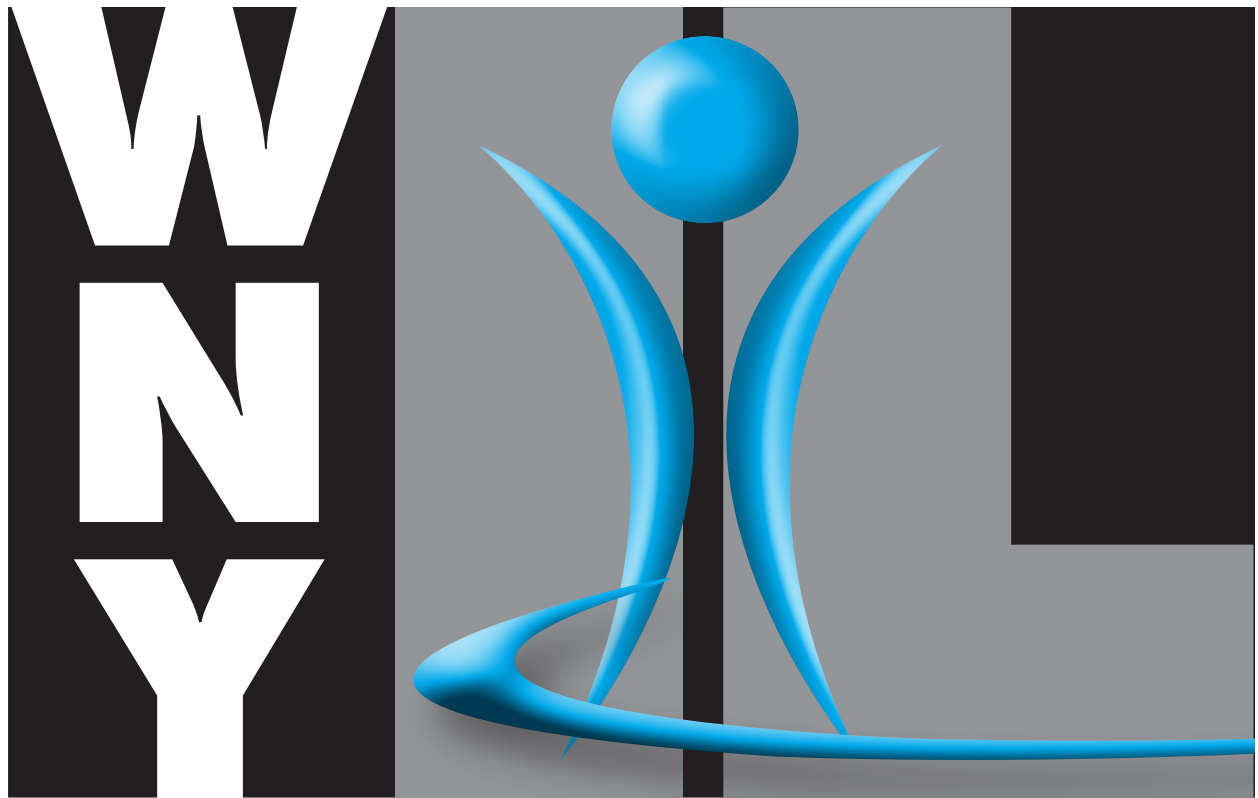


**Western New York Independent Living, Inc.**



**2019 - 2020 Annual Report**

Western New York Independent Living, Inc.

# 2019-2020 Annual Report

## Table of Contents

Western New York Independent Living, Inc. (WNYIL)	
Vision, Mission, History .....	1
Agencies .....	2
Board and Councils.....	3
President’s Report .....	4
Chief Executive Officer’s Report.....	8
WNYIL’s Work.....	11
WNYIL’s Systemic Goal Accomplishments.....	12
WNYIL Statistical Report .....	13
ILC Vignettes .....	16
Statement of Financial Position .....	18
Statement of Activities.....	19
Mental Health Peer Connection (MHPC)	
Director’s Report .....	20
Vignettes .....	21
Statistical Report .....	23
Vignettes .....	24
Independent Living of Niagara County (ILNC)	
Director’s Report .....	26
Vignettes .....	28
Statistical Report .....	30
Vignettes .....	32
Independent Living of the Genesee Region (ILGR)	
Director’s Report .....	34
Vignettes .....	35
Statistical Report .....	36
Vignettes .....	38
Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service (NFRRS) .....	40
Independence Express Transportation Department	
Director’s Report .....	42
Health Homes Care Coordination.....	44
Medicaid Application Assistance Program (MAAP).....	47

## **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)**

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)**

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)**

A peer-driven advocacy organization dedicated to facilitating self-directed growth, wellness and choice through genuine peer mentoring. Provides institutional, community and vocational-based services assisting consumers in their recovery process.

## **Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service (NFRRS)**

Your Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service gives thousands of people throughout Western New York and Southern Ontario who are blind or have a print disability daily access to a variety of print publications.

## **Executive Committee**

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

## **Board Members**

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

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

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

## **Mental Health PEER Connection Council**

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

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

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

## **Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service Council**

Richard Dread, (Chair); Ann Scherff; Miguel Santos; Peg Mergenhagen; Lori Heidenburg Morrell; Patricia LaMont.

# Message from the President of the Board of Directors

I am sure that you have heard this a million times, (if not more), but this past year has brought an enormous number of ordeals that we never thought we would ever have to confront. Our consumers have been challenged to access programs and services, while our funding streams have been diminishing; and our staff necessarily are focused on keeping consumers, volunteers, and staff safe and healthy from a worldwide killer pandemic. But through it all, our Board, volunteers, and staff have faced these obstacles head on; and, to my great pride, have met them and demonstrated to all we can survive the challenges, deliver on promised services, and grow our outreach in the face of diversity. The Family of Agencies of Western New York has once again proven that people with disabilities have a right to contribute to our communities, as we educate and empower our fellow people with disabilities to be equal participating members of our society.

With that said, let us look at what we did accomplish this past year.

1. Our family of agencies of Independent Living of the Genesee Region (ILGR), Independent Living of Niagara County (ILNC), and the Buffalo office worked collectively with six other Independent Living Centers, from the Western Southern Tier to far Northern New York to the Finger Lakes area. Under the “Taking Control” banner, we submitted a joint venture to become a Statewide vendor of Consumer-Directed Personal Assistance Services (CDPAS), providing home care to people with disabilities in 36 counties.
2. Our family of agencies continues to provide our vast array of services to over seven thousand people with disabilities, ensuring that consumers’ choice and self-direction is maintained, as they benefit from our core services of peer counseling, independent living skills, advocacy, information and referral, as well as transitional services, guiding consumers from school to higher or vocational education or employment, or from institutional to community living.

However, business-as-usual ended and everything changed, as we were hit with the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic, an event that none of us expected nor anticipated: a worldwide death-wielding virus that made our population the main target. You could say that the Coronavirus spanned the globe to come to us “people with underlying conditions”, a nice way to refer to having disabilities, medical and physical situations that result in functional limitations.

So, what did the Family of Agencies do about it? We rolled up our sleeves and made sure that the people who count on us to help them get through the more routine barriers of life can still depend on us to be there.

Specifically, we:

- A. Mobilized 162 staff to work from 136 different work sites; that is, working from home.
- B. Began making daily wellness check calls to staff.
- C. Procured the daily Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needed by staff and consumers.
- D. Provided Intelligence Technology, (or IT), support to all remote and physical work sites.
- E. Maintained safe and clean physical work sites.
- F. Established reliable communications between the Agencies and the community, maintaining continuity of operations.
- G. Conducted a two-and-one-half-month-long publicity campaign, informing the public we are still conducting business and we are just a phone call away.
- H. Created a COVID-19 resource page on our website.
- I. Increased our social media presence and have posted about issues related to not only WNYIL, but disability-related topics regarding COVID-19.
- J. Increased newsletter publications from quarterly or semi-annually to monthly for each Agency.
- K. Contacted a community-based Operation Sewing Squad that made 3,000 face coverings for Taking Control consumers to provide to their Personal Assistants.
- L. Identified sources for 10,000 face coverings for CDPAS consumers' Personal Assistants in Erie County.

- M. Determined that we will need over 60 thousand face coverings, 900 thousand gloves, and dozens of gallons of sanitizer over this next year to keep our staff, consumers, and their families safe.
- N. Established virtual support groups in which all community members can participate.
- O. Provided Tele and video services for consumers.
- P. Maintained monthly meetings of Health Homes Care Coordinators with consumers via telephone.
- Q. As the demand for regular scheduled van rides for consumers dropped off, due to the pandemic, our heroes of the road began home grocery deliveries to consumers.
- R. Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service recordings began being done at home, which staff and volunteers are then transmitting to the office for airing.
- S. Medical Loan Closet equipment is being delivered to individual's homes, as requested.

Even with all this redirection and stress put upon our staff and volunteers to continue to serve, we maintained these ongoing programs:

- **Addict 2 Addict**, remains vibrant, assisting people to recover from addiction.
- **Medicaid Application Assistant Program** is still enrolling people into health care plans.
- **New York Connects** is busier than ever, linking people with disabilities to their needed community programs and services.
- **Rapid rehousing** is being accomplished for those hit hard by the pandemic; finding them a safe, healthy place to live not only continues, but ILGR has tripled its efforts.
- **Independence Express** has proven to be WNYIL's lifeline to deliveries, communication, and transportation throughout our region.



- **Health Homes Coordination** staff continues to ensure that the social determinates of life are addressed via a healthy, safer lifestyle.
- **Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service** is not only continuing to broadcast the printed word but has made its broadcast available worldwide by streaming and podcasting online.
- And in the mist of all this activity, this year WNYIL has given birth to a new member of the Family of Agencies, the **Young Leaders and Advocates Network**.

I am proud of what Independent Living of the Genesee Region, Independent Living of Niagara County, Mental Health Peer Connection, The Renewal Center, Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service, and the Buffalo Independent Living Center have done and are continuing to do.

We, as citizens with disabilities, can proudly say that we have entered this fight, and we are winning! As our communities eventually reopen, WNYIL and our family of agencies will be there, collectively ensuring that people with disabilities will continue to have the independence to live in their neighborhoods, the freedom to work in the communities, and engage in society as equal, valuable members.

Thank you for all your support, and I look forward to citing additional accomplishments in next year's Annual Report.



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

# Report of the Chief Executive Officer

I have had a disability for 47 years, have been associated with Western New York Independent Living for 39 years, and served as its Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer for 37 years. If there is anything I've learned about people with disabilities, it is "Don't Ever Underestimate Dem"!

During that time, I saw people with disabilities in this country fight then-President Richard Nixon. And later struggle with the next two Presidents for the signing of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which accomplished much: creating a national program for people with disabilities; establishing a disability committee to advise the White House; launching a national program proactively researching disability programs/services and technologies; setting up a protection and advocacy service; and prohibiting discrimination based on disability for federally funded programs, services, and contractors. However, a set of formal regulations had to be enacted to give the Act enforcement teeth.

So, in the late 1970's, there was a concerted push targeting President Jimmy Carter, and his Secretary of Health Education and Welfare, Joseph Califano, by hundreds of people with disabilities who held demonstrations and sit-ins all over the Country. This was all to pressure them to develop and sign the regulations for Section 504 of the Rehab Act; that small paragraph that expressly prohibited discrimination preventing people with disabilities from equally participating in programs, services and activities funded by the Federal government.

Through the 1980's, President Ronald Reagan was next in the sights of people with disabilities, who won the battle to prevent his administration from "Regulatory Relief" that would gut Section 504, and nullify the Education Act for All Children (now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA). Furthermore, they convinced the Congress as well as the Reagan Administration to sign the Air Carriers Access Act of 1986 (requiring disability accommodations at airports), and the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (requiring all departments of an institution to respect civil rights laws, even if another department receives federal funding), and to put issues of concern to people with disabilities on the 1984 and 1988 presidential platforms.

President George H. W. Bush wasn't to be outdone; he teamed up with people with disabilities and ensured that the Fair Housing Act of 1988 became law, and signed the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 in front of 1,700 people with disabilities and their supporters.

In the Western New York region, people with disabilities were successful in pushing for accessible public transportation (both door-to-door para-transit vans and fixed-route buses with wheelchair lifts); setting up a City of Buffalo and an Erie County office for people with disabilities; were consulted on the accessibility of the Buffalo Bisons' baseball park, the downtown auditorium, and the light rail rapid transit service.

Focusing in on Erie, Niagara, Genesee, Orleans and Wyoming Counties, consumer advocates prompted the establishment of three Independent Living Centers, whose work ultimately saved taxpayers tens of millions of dollars every year, and collectively became the largest disabled-consumer-controlled organization serving people with disabilities in Western New York. Subsequent efforts continued to achieve historically higher benchmarks, as people with disabilities worked to improve their abilities to live in our neighborhoods, work in their communities and fully engage with society as equal partners, taxpayers, and leaders.

So, why do I recount all these past achievements? Because this past year, (forever to be known as “The great nightmare of 2020”), has not only been a challenge for the world, but a trial particularly for people with disabilities as they continue to fight for their rights to be part of our America. Let us just look at what we've been doing.

WNYIL, a community-based agency of people with disabilities, continues to compete for equal opportunities as we people with disabilities want to work, live, and play alongside of our friends and neighbors without disabilities. So, faced with this COVID-19 Pandemic, we rolled up our sleeves and got to work:

- We continue to provide programs and services to over 7,000 people.
- We distributed tens of thousands of items of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to individuals in our communities
- We provide free grocery pickup and deliveries to hundreds of people who could not get out.
- We bring the printed news to hundreds of people with print disabilities through Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service.
- We work with hundreds of individuals to avoid Emergency Room treatment and/or hospitalization due to emotional/mental health issues.
- We assist dozens of people to find homes who otherwise would have remained homeless.
- We coordinate health plans for hundreds of people with chronic health or mental health concerns.

- We provide in-home Personal Assistant supportive services for hundreds of people that want to stay in their homes.
- And we will continue to take on, with our sister Independent Living Centers across the State, an effort to bring our brothers/sisters with disabilities out of nursing home care during this pandemic.

We are going to be part of an endeavor to identify and achieve that other option than institutional care and, to coin a phrase, that is: “LIVING IN A HOME, NOT AT A HOME”.

We people with disabilities continue to fight for equal participation, and, through our Independent Living Centers, we will embrace all who have, and have lived with, a disability; striving to earn the right to live independently and contribute as equal partners in our neighborhoods, communities, and our society.

Douglas J. Usiak  
Chief Executive Officer

## **Consumer Vignettes**

Throughout this Annual Report we will be highlighting just a few of the success stories achieved by our consumers in the past year. We hope you enjoy seeing the impact our agency has on the people we serve.

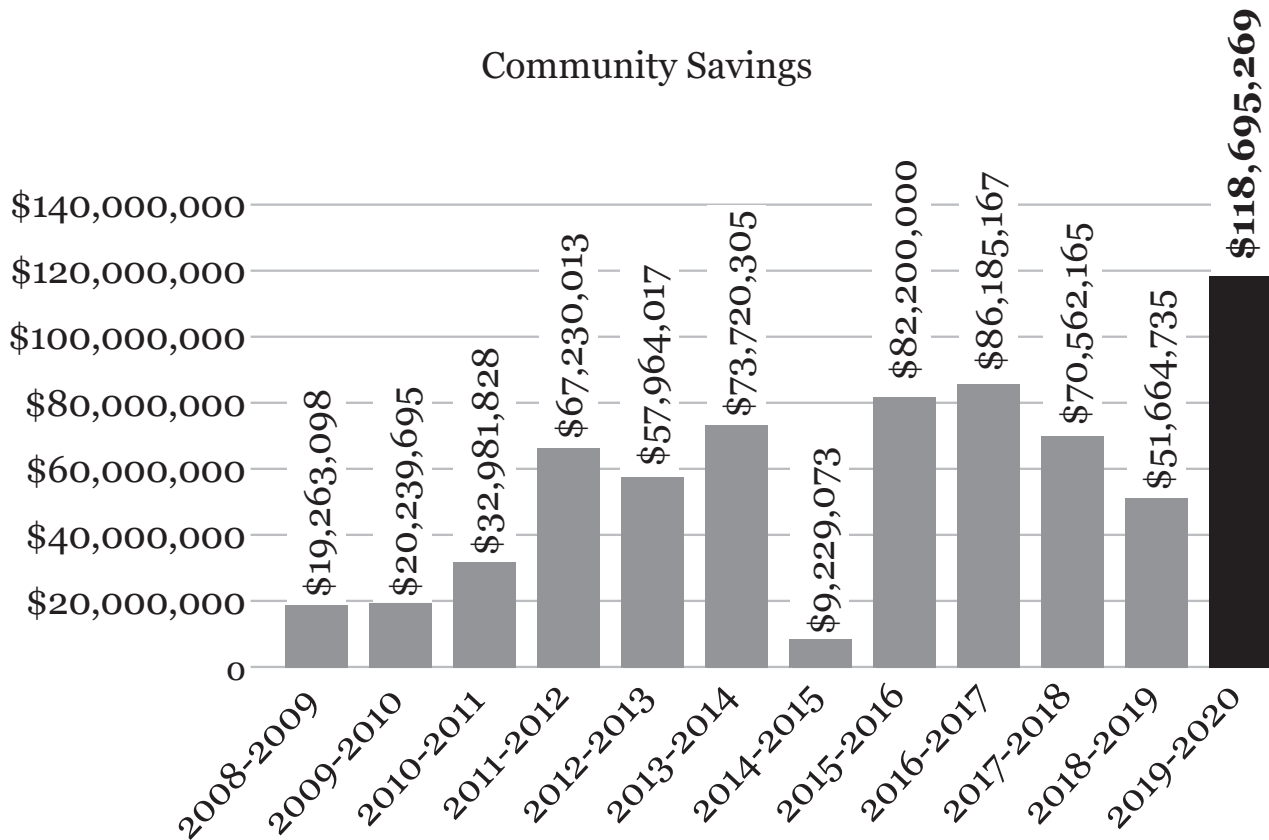
### **ILC 2019-2020 Vignette “ML” – Community living**

The Independent Living Center (ILC) received a COVID-19 emergency referral from a Facilitated Enroller (FE) with its Medicaid Application Assistance Program (MAAP). “ML” was a consumer who had suffered a stroke at age 77 and her family was attempting to keep her institutionalized. The left side of her body had become impaired and she needed assistance with grocery shopping, laundry, and household cleaning. Her family members were not willing to commit to assisting her and she was left alone and isolated. Staff from the NY Connects program were able to link her to home health care aides, emergency food pantries connected to FeedMore WNY, medical services, and wheelchair lift van transportation. Currently, ML is living independently and successfully managing her own needs.

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

**\$689,935,365**

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 2019-2020 Vignette “Consumer” - durable medical equipment**

A consumer contacted the Independent Living Center (ILC) seeking some assistance securing durable medical equipment. Due to spine issues, the consumer lived in chronic pain and could barely walk around their home, making completing any task very difficult. At the time they were requesting the resources to obtain a wheelchair, another individual had contacted the Agency wishing to donate a fairly used electric wheelchair to our Loan Closet. With the assistance of the Independence Express transportation department, we were able to pick up the electric wheelchair from the donor’s home and deliver it to the consumer, free of charge, all the while maintaining COVID-19 social distance restrictions. The chair has been working out well for the consumer and they are able to function more independently.

## Examples of WNYIL’s Systemic Goal Accomplishments

- WNYIL worked with other statewide partners to assure full accessibility to Governor Cuomo’s pandemic press briefings.
- WNYIL worked with 12 New York counties to deliver masks and other Personal Protective Equipment to persons with disabilities.
- WNYIL partnered with Housing Opportunities Made Equal to create opportunities for housing modifications so people could live more comfortably in their own homes.
- Advocates in Niagara County removed physical barriers to access from Restaurants and Public buildings in Newfane and Lockport.
- Advocates in the Genesee Region got our concerns for housing added to their Resident Opportunities and Self Sufficiency (ROSS) Program.

### **Youth Peers at WNYIL Vignette “24-year-old Youth” – Peer support**

A 24-year-old young adult came to Western New York Independent Living’s Youth Peer Advocacy Program (YPA) seeking peer support to help her cope with the symptoms of her mental health issues, specifically severe depression and anxiety. Originally expressing interest in the Youth and Young Adult Peer Support Group, she also decided to engage in one-to-one peer support in addition to the group. After pursuing these two avenues for several weeks, she shared in a one-to-one meeting that her mother was impressed that she was finding the Peer Support Group beneficial and continuing to attend, because she has a history of saying that she “hated any groups.”

Currently, she not only regularly attends the Peer Support Group but also promotes ideas on their social media sites, as well as consistently asking if there are any new members joining. She has shared that the peer support she is receiving “is helping more than meeting with my therapist” and that she wishes she had “found this sooner.” Recently, she has also expressed interest in a career in peer support, once she is further along in her own recovery.

# Annual Report 2019-2020 WNYIL Statistics

**Total Number of Consumers Served: 1662**

<b>Number of Consumers by Age:</b>
Under 5 years old: <b>1</b>
Ages 5-19: <b>48</b>
Ages 20-24: <b>62</b>
Ages 25-59: <b>748</b>
Age 60 and older: <b>801</b>
Age unavailable: <b>2</b>

<b>Number of Consumers by Race and Ethnicity:</b>
American Indian or Alaska Native: <b>32</b>
Asian: <b>61</b>
Black or African American: <b>488</b>
Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: <b>1</b>
White: <b>935</b>
Hispanic or Latino: <b>96</b>
Two or More Races: <b>6</b>
Race / Ethnicity unavailable: <b>43</b>

<b>Number of Consumers by Disability*:</b>
Cognitive: <b>547</b>
Mental / Emotional: <b>893</b>
Physical: <b>1674</b>
Sensory (hearing, vision, etc.): <b>642</b>
Multiple Disabilities: <b>1009</b>

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

<b>Number of Consumers by County of Residence:</b>	
Albany: <b>1</b>	Lewis: <b>11</b>
Allegany: <b>75</b>	Livingston: <b>1</b>
Cattaraugus: <b>110</b>	Monroe: <b>9</b>
Cayuga: <b>1</b>	Niagara: <b>169</b>
Chautauqua: <b>83</b>	Oneida: <b>1</b>
Clinton: <b>33</b>	Orleans: <b>39</b>
Erie: <b>3668</b>	Oswego: <b>1</b>
Essex: <b>9</b>	Rensselaer: <b>1</b>
Franklin: <b>29</b>	St. Lawrence: <b>74</b>
Genesee: <b>87</b>	Ulster: <b>1</b>
Greene: <b>1</b>	Westchester: <b>1</b>
Jefferson: <b>23</b>	Wyoming: <b>63</b>
	Outside of NY: <b>7</b>

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

<b>Number of Consumers by Veteran Status:</b>
Veteran (served in US military): <b>56</b>
Non-veteran (never served in US military): <b>1554</b>
Status unavailable: <b>52</b>

<b>Number of Consumers by Services Received*:</b>
Advocacy /legal services: <b>122</b>
Assistive devices/equipment: <b>12</b>
Children's services: <b>1</b>
Communication services: <b>801</b>
Counseling services: <b>77</b>
Housing and shelter services: <b>11</b>
Information and referral services: <b>3517</b>



<b>Number of Consumers by Services Received*:</b>
IL skill development and life skills services: <b>104</b>
Mobility training services: <b>12</b>
Peer counseling services: <b>338</b>
Personal assistance services: <b>787</b>
Recreational services: <b>16</b>
Transportation services: <b>137</b>
Youth services: <b>10</b>
Vocational services: <b>3</b>
Plan for the achievement of self support services: <b>12</b>
Business /Industry /Agency Services: <b>19</b>
Benefits advisement services: <b>441</b>
Voter registration services: <b>1</b>
Other: <b>4</b>

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

**Number of Businesses/Agencies Served: 42**





### **ILC 2019-2020 Vignette “John” - Housing**

As his income levels were too high to qualify for most nursing home diversion programs, “John” lived in a nursing home for more than a year. He came to the Independent Living Center (ILC) for assistance, who did not give up after the first few “closed doors”; following research a place was found for him in the Fallon Health Weinberg PACE (All-inclusive Care for the Elderly) program. This provided him the autonomy of having his own apartment, as well as the closeness of vital medical services.

### **ILC 2019-2020 Vignette “Nicole” - Release to home**

In a wheelchair, with very limited mobility after suffering multiple strokes and a stay in the hospital, “Nicole” was in a nursing home in January 2020, when Independent Living Center (ILC) staff completed Agency Intake and Informed Consent documents for the Open Doors/Money Follows the Person (MFP) program. After meeting with the facility’s social worker and Nicole’s sister Rene, we completed a Baseline Quality of Life Survey, and Nicole was able to be discharged to her home in March 2020. Our counselor learned from Rene that Nicole has since completed Medicaid recertification and an application for the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Waiver with Headway of Western New York, and ILC will continue to follow-up her case with Headway. In September 2020, Rene advised us that Nicole is in reasonably good health and continues to live independently in the community with proper support services.

### **ILC 2019-2020 Vignette “Sandy” – New supported housing**

A largely mobility-impaired woman, “Sandy” was about to lose her Belmont Housing Resources for Western New York Section 8 Voucher as Belmont would not give her current apartment a passing grade after the Inspection. While she had paid the entire rent on her own for a year, she was unable to continue doing so. Sandy had difficulty locating another place to live, as she didn’t have access to online apartment searches.

The Independent Living Center (ILC) staff person applied for two extensions from Belmont, was ultimately able to secure a new apartment that was approved by Belmont in which Sandy is looking forward to residing. Additionally, we were able to contact her Managed Long-Term Care (MLTC) company Medicaid worker and are in the process of submitting documentation which would eliminate the requirement of a Medicaid Spend-down of her funds, saving her over a \$100 per month in rent.



Western New York Independent Living, Inc. and Affiliates  
**Statements of Financial Position September 30, 2020 and 2019**

<b>Assets</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>
Current assets:		
Cash and equivalents	\$ 14,476,549	6,728,542
Contracts and fees receivable, net (note 3)	10,726,988	11,797,514
Prepaid insurance and expenses	233,078	47,348
Investments - non marketable securities (note 4)	<u>9,962</u>	<u>18,586</u>
Total current assets	<u>25,446,577</u>	<u>18,591,990</u>
Loan receivable (note 5)	<u>130,000</u>	<u>—</u>
Property and equipment, at cost:		
Leasehold improvements	2,483,991	2,476,465
Office equipment	491,130	491,130
Vans and related equipment	384,171	288,609
Computers and related equipment	<u>583,931</u>	<u>576,573</u>
	3,943,223	3,832,777
Less accumulated depreciation	<u>(2,962,703)</u>	<u>(2,660,072)</u>
Net property and equipment	<u>980,5205</u>	<u>1,172,705</u>
Other assets	<u>12,564</u>	<u>12,622</u>
	<b><u>\$26,569,661</u></b>	<b><u>19,777,317</u></b>
<b><u>Liabilities and Net Assets</u></b>		
Current liabilities:		
Accounts payable	697,544	513,291
Deferred revenue (note 6)	3,412,005	3,907,828
Accrued salaries	2,048,289	1,763,943
Accrued expenses	374,426	367,865
Promissory note - paycheck protection program (note 8)	<u>23,700</u>	<u>—</u>
Total current liabilities	6,555,964	6,552,927
Net assets:		
Net assets without donor restrictions	18,982,509	13,224,390
Net assets with donor restrictions (note 9)	<u>1,031,188</u>	<u>—</u>
Total net assets	20,013,697	13,224,390
Commitments (note 12)		
Total liabilities and net assets	<b><u>\$ 26,569,661</u></b>	<b><u>19,777,317</u></b>

See accompanying notes to financial statements.

Western New York Independent Living, Inc. and Affiliates  
**Statements of Activities Years ended September 30, 2020 and 2019**

	<b>2020</b>	<b>2019</b>
Revenue:		
Contracts and grants	\$ 6,268,396	6,407,437
Consumer directed personal assistant services	44,014,048	44,388,880
Fees for services	728,419	748,057
Contributions and membership	2,645	4,599
Fundraising	20,800	64,443
Investment income	112,955	49,184
Other revenue	<u>12,108</u>	<u>27,994</u>
Total revenue	51,159,371	51,690,594
Net assets released from donor restrictions	<u>48,389</u>	<u>—</u>
Total revenue and other support	<u>51,207,760</u>	<u>51,690,594</u>
Expenses:		
Program services	43,038,712	45,029,891
Management and general	<u>2,410,929</u>	<u>3,272,880</u>
Total expenses	<u>45,449,641</u>	<u>48,302,771</u>
Change in net assets without donor restrictions	<u>5,758,119</u>	<u>3,387,823</u>
Change in net assets without donor restrictions:		
Revenue - contracts and support	1,079,577	—
Net assets released from donor restrictions	<u>(48,389)</u>	<u>—</u>
Change in net assets without donor restrictions	<u>1,031,188</u>	<u>—</u>
Change in net assets	6,789,307	3,387,823
Net assets at beginning of year	13,224,390	9,736,790
Transfer of net assets from Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service, Inc.	<u>—</u>	<u>99,777</u>
Net assets at end of year	<b><u>\$ 20,013,697</u></b>	<b><u>13,224,390</u></b>

See accompanying notes to financial statements.



## **Mental Health PEER Connection Director's Report**

Mental Health PEER Connection (MHPC), a member of the WNY Independent Living, Inc's family of agencies, is a peer-driven advocacy organization dedicated to facilitating self-directed growth, wellness, and choice through genuine peer mentoring.

Last year, I don't think many of us gave much thought about our Mission Statement, above. But with the historic year we have had, all of us could probably use the MHPC services, somewhat. The MHPC title isn't just a bunch of fancy words we put on documents to look astute. MHPC is a living, thriving action that occurs daily at the center, in the community, and virtually. Knowing that nobody wants to be told what they must do, at MHPC, we are just the Peer guides who encourage consumers to grow by seeking their own direction. We have become guides by surmounting our own hurdles into participation in the community and over various other barriers in life. Being this kind of guide takes skill, finesse, active communication, and attention to details. The details that we've learned will work!

Our staff has assisted several people with mental health issues to transition out of Buffalo Psychiatric Center, the hospital Behavioral Health units, group homes, or even out of prison. We have found that there no longer is a separation of jail and other institutions in the way our consumers must live: each lack freedom and self-determination. We assist people who have been institutionalized, traumatized, and verbalized to learn how to live in the community. We assist them in finding housing, learning everyday household skills, and navigating around one's own community. Our Peers offer support, thoughtfulness, and a listening ear to those with emotional issues. We also have Peers who are experts in maximizing an individual's full potential while on disability support programs or in need of the necessities of life.

Then we guide them through a final step, which will be the ultimate choice of many individuals: becoming a contributing member of society. WE assist people with gaining

real employment. There are some authorities who say 80% of people with mental health issues in the nation are unemployed. At MHPC, close to 40% of the people who self-directed their growth to achieve employment obtained their goal.

These things didn't happen just because of our Agency. They occurred thanks to the dedicated Peer staff -- and all staff -- at MHPC. All are committed, themselves, to facilitating self-directed growth, wellness and choice.

Currently it is said that, nationally, mental health issues and substance use disorders have increased 40%. In our region, MHPC makes that percentage decrease; at least it did this past year. Please come in, allow us into your community, or join virtually. Just call 716-836-0822, extension 120.

Maura Kelley, CPRP  
Director of MHPC

### **MHPC 2019-2020 Vignette – “Debbie” Benefits Advisement - Employment (BS)**

“Debbie”, a 43-year old Caucasian woman who suffers with depression, anxiety, and other medical issues, was referred to the Western New York Independent Living, Inc. by an outside counselor for benefits advisement to ensure she understood how working would affect her Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits. After discussing her benefits and reviewing her Social Security Administration Benefits Planning Query statement (BPQY), Debbie became employed, part-time, writing articles in May 2020 and is currently employed and maintaining both her independence and benefits.

### **MHPC 2019-2020 Vignette “Jaime” Enhancement Program**

“Jamie”, a 41-year-old Caucasian woman, came to the Agency's Enhancement Program in October 21, 2019. She has both mental health and physical disabilities and was pending Social Security benefits but had been told that those applying for Social Security benefits cannot work at all. Our Peer assisted her in developing goals to enroll in college, to manage pain without having to take medication, to develop coping skills, and to learn how many hours a person can work and still be eligible for Social Security. Jamie explained she can manage working 20 hours weekly, but more than that and her

pain increases to a point in which she is unable to function and remain independent.

Jamie began working on her goals by attending the Enhancement Program daily for life and vocational skills development. After three months, she enrolled at Erie Community College City Campus (ECC-City) to begin working towards a degree. She earned a place on the Dean's List in her first semester. On days she was not in school, she continued to develop life and vocational skills and met with the Agency's Benefits Advisor to determine how many hours she could work while pending Social Security, which, fortunately, was 20 hours weekly. Within two weeks of meeting with the Benefits Advisor, Jamie obtained employment at a dollar store.

Our staff spoke with Jamie recently and learned she is still attending college classes and has been on the Dean's List every semester, even after they moved to virtual classes due to the pandemic. Within the next eight months she will have a diploma. She has maintained her employment for the past four months, while so many have been laid off due to COVID-19. She went on to share that she is not missing days of work thanks to her development of coping and pain management skills.





## Annual Report 2019-2020 MHPC Statistics

<b>Addict to Addict Peer and Family Support Program*:</b>
Total number of interactions with individuals presenting with substance use issues: <b>1528</b>
Total number of individual follow up's completed: <b>669</b>
Total number of individual calls responded to within 2 hours: <b>643</b>
Total number of interactions with families and caregivers of individuals who have substance use issues: <b>446</b>
Total number of continued support or families and caregivers: <b>69</b>
Total number of family or caregiver calls responded to within 2 hours: <b>296</b>
Total number of family support groups: <b>110</b>
Total number of community presentations regarding family members in relationships with people who have substance use issues: <b>39</b>

*\*Reflects January-December 2020 Data.*

<b>ECDMH Benefits Advisement, Life Coaching, and Work Support Programs*:</b>
Total number of individuals who received benefits advisement services: <b>193</b>
Total number of individuals served whose qualifying benefits were identified: <b>18</b>
Total number of individuals who were certified or re-certified for benefits: <b>22</b>
Total number of individuals who received life coaching services: <b>631</b>
Total number of individuals who had an improved quality of life: <b>31</b>
Total number of individuals whose basic needs (housing, financial, mental, physical, wellness) were met: <b>52</b>
Total number of individuals who completed a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP): <b>81</b>
Total number of individuals who received work support services: <b>122</b>

*\*Reflects January - December 2020 Data.*

**Enhancement Program:** Percentage of individuals who obtained employment through the program: **23.81%**

### **MHPC 2019-2020 Vignette - “Dana” – The Renewal Center**

A 43-year-old Caucasian female who has a diagnosis of severe depression and anxiety, “Dana” came to The Renewal Center (TRC) hospital diversion program describing her crisis as “wanting to kill (herself)”. She had formulated a plan and was contemplating carrying it out 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 explore her therapist’s suggestion of a different type of therapy, and she was thrilled to realize that her therapist was actually 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

### **MHPC 2019-2020 Vignette - “PJ” – Addiction recovery (GV)**

When our MHPC Peer met “PJ” in the Emergency Room of Erie County Medical Center (ECMC), the 37-year-old Caucasian male was in acute withdrawal from heroin use and was being admitted into ECMC’s Detoxification Unit. In the 15 to 20 minutes that were available, the Peer told PJ about recovery and how recovery from addiction is possible for him, including supports we provide, such as our Addict 2 Addict, Family 2 Family (A2A, F2F) program. Besides providing literature on our program and encouraging him to call us for added support and resources, the Peer shared some of her recovery story, how she became clean and sober, and how addicts can abstain and prolong their recovery. Furthermore, the Peer explained the benefits of attending self-help gatherings and suggested that, once PJ completes his inpatient treatment, he should try Narcotics

Anonymous (NA) meetings. She provided an NA schedule, wished him luck in Detox, and stated, “You can do this, PJ.”

About a month later, the Peer was attending her regular Friday night NA meeting and sat down at the table without paying attention to the person sitting next to her. She felt a nudge from the guy and was pleased to see that it was PJ! He had followed through and was attending an NA meeting! That was a year ago; PJ is still clean and sober and still attends that same Friday night NA meeting.

### **MHPC 2019-2020 Vignette “Sara” - Suicidal ideation (RB)**

On one of the Mental Health PEER Connection (MHPC) counselor’s initial contacts, “Sara” said that she was lonely, had no support from anyone, and that she had nothing to live for. Sara wished that she was dead.

The staff member talked to Sara, tried to calm her down, and suggested reasons for her to go on living. This began a practice of the counselor calling and speaking to Sara every morning; eventually, the consumer said that she looked forward to their talks.

When she was unable to reach Sara for a few days, the staff member became concerned, but when she eventually succeeded, she was greatly encouraged. Sara said that she had joined a group of women of her age who took walks and exercised every morning, who gave her support. She finally began to make new friends.

### **MHPC 2019-2020 Vignette**

#### **“A consumer” – Avoiding re-hospitalization (RO)**

A Mental Health PEER Connection (MHPC) counselor assisted “a consumer” who had occasional difficulty controlling her behavior that led to involuntary stays in the hospital for psychological evaluations. In order to avoid re-hospitalization, our staff member helped the consumer to develop an effective Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP). It emphasized being positive, committing to activities she finds enjoyable, and having a set strategy when negative behaviors are triggered to change them into positive actions. Specifically, when other people’s behaviors trigger the consumer, she picks an activity from her WRAP, such as writing poetry, and does it instead. This has helped the consumer to stay out of the hospital for more than a year.



## 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) has had a year of change and transformation in many ways during 2019-2020. Throughout this year of frequent uncertainty and inspired improvisation, the staff of ILNC worked to communicate with their consumers and continue to provide services in ways that, until now, were considered non-traditional; becoming remote workers and providing services from outside of the office. By working together, we were able to overcome the many challenges and continue to provide support by reaching out to our consumers.

The ILNC Team participated in community education forums, coalitions and outreaches in order to continue education in 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 2019. **ILNC's Meet the Candidates Day** hosted several Niagara County candidates who would be represented on the November ballot.
- February 2020. 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 Ort, Assemblyman Michael J. Norris, and 29th District Assemblyman Angelo J. Morinello to explain the importance of our 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.

- **June 2020. ILNC's Disability Pride Niagara Olmstead Celebration** was celebrated with two viewing parties of the Netflix documentary "Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution" and followed with a conversation with International Disability Rights Leader Judith Heumann. During a virtual forum and discussion, participants were able to ask Judy various questions about her vast experience in the disability movement. This celebration marked the 21st anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's Olmstead Decision, endorsing the right of citizens with disabilities to live in the least restrictive environment.
- **July 2020. ILNC Staff participated in WNYIL's Disability Pride virtual Celebration.**
- **August 2020. ILNC's 1st Annual Walk, Run and Roll** offered people the opportunity to go out and move, while showing support for their local Independent Living Center. In this inaugural activity, ILNC promoted wellness during times when most endeavors were taking place in a virtual universe. Over 35 people participated in the first event!

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 worked with Niagara County Department of Emergency Management in order to obtain necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for the programs of ILNC to be able to operate during the pandemic.
- ILNC Staff were able to work with local non-profit agencies to assist in the provision of Independent Livings Services for those that they work with.
- Through the advocacy of local community members, signage and parking signs were properly installed to allow for the Niagara County Town of Newfane to become compliant with Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

- Following a consumer complaint, staff was able to work with the City of Niagara Falls and the Niagara Falls Task Force to ensure that the appropriate curb cuts were made to allow for increased compliance, and safety measures were made to allow for Title III of the ADA to be adhered to.
- Staff from ILNC was appointed to the Niagara County Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services Community Services Board to serve as the first peer on the Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Subcommittee.

Sarah K. Lanzo  
Director of ILNC

### **ILNC 2019-2020 Vignette “Brian” - Addict 2 Addict – Niagara**

A 36-year-old male who struggled for many years with his addiction, “Brian” reached out to Independent Living of Niagara County (ILNC)’s Addict 2 Addict Niagara program (A2A NC) while in long-term in-patient treatment. At the initial contact, Brian stated that he was interested in getting some additional peers as supports for his recovery, and we began making arrangements immediately. He started attending various recovery pathway meetings with our A2A NC Peer Support Specialist, as well as learning about different and new pathways that were available. At the meetings, Brian started to share with other participants about his journey, while benefiting from their experience, strength and hope.

As of October 1, 2020, he has celebrated one year clean, has since graduated his long-term inpatient treatment and moved to a reintegration house in Buffalo. When he originally moved to Western New York, Brian didn’t know anyone; when he became involved in his recovery, he has since been able to go back to college and continue to move forward, setting goals and striving to achieve them.

### **ILNC 2019-2020 Vignette “51-year-old male” - NY Connects:**

A hospital social worker called Independent Living of Niagara County (ILNC)’s NY Connects line for assistance with safely transitioning a patient back into the community. A recently widowed 51-year-old male, with a history of head trauma and memory impairments, who had no financial means of support, had been hospitalized due to homelessness caused by his eviction.

In order to provide Options Counseling, we needed answers to some basic questions: What would a favorable transition look like for the consumer? How could we ensure he can get long-term supports and services? Was the patient willing -- and able to manage -- to live alone? In what area of the county? For what types of assistance was he eligible, and would he agree to accept them? Also discussed were: the strategies of chronic disease self-management; availability of in-home attendants for people with disabilities; and possible enrollment into adult day programs and/or social recreation/traumatic brain injury rehabilitation.

The consumer was assisted with applications for Social Security benefits, and the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP, also called Food Stamps); and referred to both Headway of Western New York and Venture Forthe, Inc., agencies which work with individuals with traumatic brain injury for case management. He is able to live in his own place in the community of his choice thanks to a loan from a family member. Enrollment into Meals on Wheels was set up, along with a new primary care physician to resume ongoing medical care.

In addition, the consumer agreed to allow an Adult Protection caseworker to provide financial oversight, to prevent him from being a victim of financial abuse, until he was ready to manage on his own.



The image is a screenshot of a Zoom meeting. On the left side, there are four small video thumbnails of participants. The main area of the screen is dominated by a video player. The video player shows a black and white portrait of a woman with glasses, smiling. To the right of the portrait is a dark overlay with white and orange text. The text reads: "N FILM CRIP CAMP A DISABILITY REVOLUTION LIVE DISCUSSION WITH JUDITH HEUMANN PRESENTED BY INDEPENDENT LIVING OF NIAGARA COUNTY". Below this, it says "THANKS FOR JOINING US!" and "DISCUSSION WILL BEGIN AT 6:00PM". At the bottom of the video player, there are standard video controls: a play button, a progress bar showing 0:00:03, and a full screen button. The Zoom interface at the bottom shows a microphone icon, a chat icon, and a timer showing 1:22:30.

# Annual Report 2019-2020 ILNC Statistics

**Total Number of Consumers Served: 333**

<b>Number of Consumers by Age:</b>
Under 5 years old: <b>1</b>
Ages 5-19: <b>5</b>
Ages 20-24: <b>10</b>
Ages 25-59: <b>142</b>
Age 60 and older: <b>175</b>

<b>Number of Consumers by Race and Ethnicity:</b>
American Indian or Alaska Native: <b>14</b>
Asian: <b>3</b>
Black or African American: <b>81</b>
White: <b>220</b>
Hispanic or Latino: <b>6</b>
Two or More Races: <b>1</b>
Race/Ethnicity unavailable: <b>8</b>

<b>Number of Consumers by Disability*:</b>
Cognitive: <b>204</b>
Mental/Emotional: <b>215</b>
Physical: <b>751</b>
Sensory (hearing, vision, etc.): <b>200</b>
Multiple Disabilities: <b>287</b>

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

<b>Number of Consumers by County of Residence:</b>
Cattaraugus: <b>1</b>
Chautauqua: <b>1</b>
Erie: <b>63</b>



<b>Number of Consumers by County of Residence:</b>
Genesee: <b>11</b>
Jefferson: <b>1</b>
New York: <b>1</b>
Niagara: <b>1049</b>
Orleans: <b>5</b>
Wyoming: <b>4</b>

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

<b>Number of Consumers by Veteran Status:</b>
Veteran (served in US military): <b>17</b>
Non-veteran (never served in US military): <b>311</b>
Status unavailable: <b>5</b>

<b>Number of Consumers by Services Received*:</b>
Advocacy /legal services: <b>16</b>
Assistive devices /equipment: <b>2</b>
Communication services: <b>7</b>
Counseling services: <b>1</b>
Housing and shelter services: <b>9</b>
Information and referral services: <b>877</b>
IL skill development and life skills services: <b>16</b>
Peer counseling services: <b>82</b>
Personal assistance services: <b>229</b>
Recreational services: <b>1</b>
Transportation services: <b>5</b>
Vocational services: <b>5</b>
Plan for the Achievement of Self Support: <b>1</b>
Business /Industry /Agency services: <b>9</b>
Benefits advisement services: <b>17</b>

<b>Number of Consumers by Services Received*:</b>
Other: <b>17</b>

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

**Number of Businesses /Agencies Served: 79**

**ILNC 2019-2020 Vignette “Kay” - Housing**

In late May 2020, a man with disabilities, “Kay” called Independent Living of Niagara County (ILNC) seeking assistance with a number of issues that could fall under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), most that we deal with routinely. He was no longer able to work but he was approved for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Also, Kay needed affordable housing, but was unable to do many of the routine household chores many people take for granted. Lacking a car, he was limited in getting to places in the community, such as for apartment hunting.

We were pleased that, by the end of August, he had everything he had requested: a home care Personal Assistant to help with his daily living needs, through Consumer-Directed Personal Assistance Services (CDPAS); a new apartment with a view he loves and a \$180.00 reduction in rent; and help developing a plan to adjust to his new life style. As a family of agencies, we often provide this kind of assistance, but to complete the process from start to finish in just over two months is unusual; Kay considers it a blessing!

**ILNC 2019-2020 Vignette “Christina” - Addict 2 Addict – Niagara**

In March 2020, when she was in crisis, a 41-year-old female, “Christina”, made a life-changing phone call to Independent Living of Niagara County (ILNC)’s Addict 2 Addict Niagara program (A2A NC). Frantically crying, she stated that she was ready to stop using; so, our Addict 2 Addict Peer Specialist talked her through what she was experiencing. The next day, our Peer Specialist followed up to give her more information about recovery meetings that were occurring virtually; (all the in-person meetings in the area had been closed, due to the COVID-19 restrictions). Almost immediately, Christina started attending meetings, and she has recently celebrated six months of recovery. She has explored multiple different pathways and taken something away from each of them.

Christina has children, has recently gone through a breakup with her partner, and remained clean through that potentially traumatic experience by continuing to pursue her recovery and talking through the different challenges she has conquered. She has recently achieved employment as a Personal Care Aide and is starting a new journey in

her life, career-wise. Also, she is currently thinking about becoming a Peer Specialist, herself, to help others in the future.

### **ILNC 2019-2020 Vignette “Suzie” - ILNC CDPAS**

A 71-year-old woman who lives by herself and has always been very independent, “Suzie” had a tragic car accident, and quickly found that she needed help with her everyday activities. She received in-home personal care through Independent Living of Niagara County (ILNC)’s Consumer-Directed Personal Assistance Services (CDPAS) Program, and was able to hire her very good friend as her Personal Assistant (PA), so Suzie is very comfortable with the help she receives.

Suzie recently had a second surgery on her legs and was in need of a portable commode; we had exactly what she needed in our Loan Closet. Later on, she later asked if it was possible to borrow a transport wheelchair and was gratified that we had one for her to use! Suzie said that our Agency and its CDPAS program were the only things that made it possible to come home to recoup from her surgeries and not have to spend months in a rehabilitation facility.





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

Most people can't wait for 2020 to be over. It certainly brought challenges to service delivery organizations! Independent Living of the Genesee Region (ILGR) gratefully acknowledges that we did not lose any staff to the coronavirus or downsizing from the pandemic; (as of December 2020, anyway). 2020 certainly could have been worse for us.

Of course, changes had to be made. Five essential team members remained working in the office while the remaining staff members adapted to work-from-home throughout the shutdown. In order to continue services, we relied on each other and technology, while, necessarily, postage costs increased, and our trusty fax machine received a workout.

By mid-July we were able to have 50 percent of our staff return to the office; using face masks, conference rooms with Plexiglas partitions and social distancing guidelines for face-to-face meetings. Our Warsaw location resumed in-person services as well.

Due to the decline of new COVID infections in our area, by September, we were able to have 75 percent of staff working in the office.

The pandemic created an economic crisis of unemployment and isolation for many people. Fortunately, none of our Consumer-Directed Personal Care Service (CDPAS) consumers lost the support of their care provider. By working with the Independence Express transportation department, we were able to assist with the delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE), loan closet equipment, and food directly to the front door of consumers.

As we ourselves faced the reality of living with the shutdown and global pandemic, we continued to provide support through peer counseling and active listening, although much was done by telephone or online. Sometimes that was all our consumers needed. This has been a year of epic challenges for all of us at Independent Living of the Genesee Region, and we are grateful that our work is making a difference in the community, one person at a time.

Rae Frank  
Director of ILGR

## **ILGR 2019-2020 Vignette “Cindy” Consumer-Directed Personal Assistance Services**

An older woman whose disabilities required that she be helped with daily living needs to remain in the comfort of her own home, ongoing care for “Cindy” was frustrating and wearing out her family. Increasingly upset with her inability to do things on her own instead of asking for her family’s help, Cindy felt like a burden; and hearing the family talk about considering a nursing home placement brought her to tears.

Fortunately, Cindy’s son had heard of a program offered through Independent Living of the Genesee Region (ILGR) that can help Medicaid recipients in their homes, the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Services Program (CDPAS). His call to ILGR began a life-changing process to lead Cindy toward maintaining her independence, as she dealt with health issues due to aging. After a couple of nursing evaluations and guidance to securing Managed Long-Term Care, Cindy was approved for weekly Personal Assistant (Care Aide) services in her home. ILGR informed the family that Cindy could choose whomever she would like as her Aide. Cindy was thrilled to learn that her granddaughter, who was looking for employment, could be paid to help her with her care and household chores. Cindy and her family felt secure in knowing that she had trusted care with all those daily activities that Cindy was no longer able to provide for herself. CDPAS had made the difference in Cindy remaining self-sufficient at home, rather than facing the possibility of entering a nursing home.

**ILGR 2019-2020 Vignette “Tom” – Medicaid application** Independent Living of the Genesee Region (ILGR) was contacted by a legally blind individual, “Tom”, who had been in the hospital for a few weeks, had no friends or family in the community, and needed assistance. Having lost his Social Security and Medicare, Tom needed help with applying for Medicaid. He had contacted numerous agencies in the prior few months, whose staff had pledged to aid him, but no one ever called back to begin the processes. Our counselor assured Tom that, with his assistance, we would help him in obtaining these three avenues of support. As he had previously used Medicare and Social Security, we felt he could take the necessary steps to re-establish them. Our staff assisted Tom with applying for Medicaid; at this writing, his paperwork is at the Department of Social Services awaiting approval. When informed that we had submitted his application for Medicaid, he could not thank us enough. He stated, “Thank you for keeping your promise to not be just another agency that turns their head [away from] me. You said you would help me with these things, and you kept your word.”

# Annual Report 2019-2020 ILGR Statistics

**Total Number of Consumers Served: 236**

<b>Number of Consumers by Age:</b>
Under 5 years old: <b>1</b>
Ages 5-19: <b>2</b>
Ages 20-24: <b>6</b>
Ages 25-59: <b>108</b>
Age 60 and older: <b>118</b>
Age unavailable: <b>1</b>

<b>Number of Consumers by Race and Ethnicity:</b>
American Indian or Alaska Native: <b>3</b>
Asian: <b>1</b>
Black or African American: <b>11</b>
White: <b>211</b>
Hispanic or Latino: <b>1</b>
Race/Ethnicity Unavailable: <b>9</b>

<b>Number of Consumers by Disability*:</b>
Cognitive: <b>73</b>
Mental/Emotional: <b>120</b>
Physical: <b>654</b>
Sensory (hearing, vision, etc.): <b>72</b>
Multiple Disabilities: <b>154</b>

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

<b>Number of Consumers by County of Residence:</b>
Allegany: <b>1</b>
Cattaraugus: <b>1</b>
Erie: <b>11</b>

<b>Number of Consumers by County of Residence:</b>
Genesee: <b>706</b>
Hamilton: <b>1</b>
Livingston: <b>10</b>
Monroe: <b>11</b>
Orleans: <b>112</b>
Ulster: <b>1</b>
Wayne: <b>1</b>
Wyoming: <b>133</b>
Outside of NYS: <b>1</b>

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

<b>Number of Consumers by Veteran Status:</b>
Veteran (served in US military): <b>10</b>
Non-veteran (never served in US military): <b>219</b>
Status unavailable: <b>7</b>

<b>Number of Consumers by Services Received*:</b>
Advocacy /legal services: <b>33</b>
Assistive devices /equipment: <b>22</b>
Housing and shelter services: <b>4</b>
Information and referral services: <b>818</b>
IL skill development and life skills services: <b>87</b>
Peer counseling services: <b>14</b>
Personal assistance services: <b>83</b>
Transportation services: <b>1</b>
Youth services: <b>1</b>
Vocational services: <b>15</b>
Plan for the achievement of self support services: <b>1</b>
Benefits advisement services: <b>11</b>
Other: <b>36</b>

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

## **Number of Businesses /Agencies Served: 6**

### **ILGR 2019-2020 Vignette “WD” – Housing, Employment**

Nine months ago, a man with a learning disability who was living out of a camper in a friend’s yard with no running water and no electricity, “WD” first came to Independent Living of the Genesee Region (ILGR) for assistance. Not having a job, a car or a driver’s license, and with no other source of income for food or personal items, he would occasionally get a ride to food banks. However, after learning about our services, he worked with us to develop goals towards living more independently. He started by seeking temporary public assistance at his local Department of Social Services, using our services to complete the applications, because he cannot read due to his disability. Next, WD was linked with our employment specialist to obtain a job as a Personal Assistant, (also known as a Personal Care Aide or PCA), and he discovered that he enjoyed helping people. He has worked in that position for almost one year. Since then, he has created additional goals for gaining assistance with reading his mail and submitting other applications. Having completed every goal that he set for himself, WD now works two full-time jobs; he no longer receives any temporary public assistance and has his own vehicle and an apartment.

### **ILGR 2019-2020 Vignette “DC” - Housing and benefits**

In January 2020, having just been released from prison the previous day after serving a seven-year term, “DC” walked into Independent Living of the Genesee Region (ILGR) needing assistance in many different areas. He had moved from the motel paid for by Genesee County Department of Social Services (DSS) to a local boarding house. ILGR’s NY Connects staff helped DC set up an action plan. He had already applied for federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Plan (SNAP) food stamps, Public Cash Assistance (PA), and Medicaid. Our staff assisted him with the process of applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), contacting the Social Security Administration office together to make an appointment, which led to him submitting the application in February.

DC and our staff also completed the application for a free government cell phone. Then, DC was referred to ILGR’s Rapid Rehousing program, which provides rental assistance.



Together, our staff and DC continued to look for available apartments on a weekly basis, and housing lists were mailed to him when they were available. In June, DC and our staff learned that his SSI claim and U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) assistance were both approved. By mid-September, DC found an apartment and moved into his own place. It required many calls, numerous meetings, and pure determination by everyone involved, so that DC achieved his success story!

### **ILGR 2019-2020 Vignette “JM” - Social Security Benefits**

Late in 2019, “JM” came to Independent Living of the Genesee Region (ILGR) to explore his available options. His mother was about to move to a nursing home, and he had never lived on his own. As his anxiety and psoriasis had gotten progressively worse, JM could no longer work; however, he had previously applied to Social Security and had been denied.

With help from our Independent Living Specialist (ILS), JM applied for Social Security Supplemental Security Income (SSI), to Social Services for federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Plan (SNAP) food stamps, and for cash assistance. Ironically, on this attempt, JM was denied both cash assistance and SSI, due to a savings account bond that his mother had taken out for him. However, our ILS investigated the account and found that, in fact, it was not over the resource limit. We appealed both Social Services and Social Security’s decisions; and JM was then approved for cash assistance.

In March 2020, JM had two interviews with Social Security for his physical and mental evaluations. By June 2020, JM was approved for SSI. JM’s mother did go into the nursing home, but he was able to stay living in his house because he had secured income.

# The Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service



*A proud affiliate of WNY Independent Living*

## Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service Director's Report

“When the going gets tough, the tough get going.”

Sure, that may be a tired and overused expression for describing the last year - but it fits! It fits because in the face of all the restrictions put in place by the COVID pandemic, your Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service actually read more publications for more total hours than any year in recent memory. It fits because we added the Internet to our broadcast platform, enabling thousands of new Listeners, especially those isolated at home, to access almost any program they wanted, when they wanted it, from wherever they were, on any Internet-connected device. And it fits because our partnerships with volunteers and our engagement with our Listeners are deeper and more meaningful - allowing our radio station to better meet the needs and interests of our community.

It fits because of our move online, which was made possible with seed grants from the James H. Cummings Foundation and the Facebook Journalism Project. (That's right, Facebook!) They saw the value we brought to our community by extending the reach of our daily and weekly newspapers to an underserved but important audience and they wanted to help us serve even more Listeners. With a brand new website anchoring our online feeds and apps that access our live stream and podcasts, we expect that the number of Listeners we serve to grow into the thousands within a couple years.

It fits because of the support of our volunteers. When it became clear in March that, even though your Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service is considered an essential media, asking them to come to the studios every week was possibly putting them in harm's way, we closed down our studio to all but the volunteers who read the Buffalo News and USA Today live. Faced with huge gaps in our program schedule, we challenged our volunteer readers to find a way to record their publications from home. And they not only met that challenge, they knocked it out of the park! Using an amazing array of devices - desktops, laptops, tablets and even smartphones - and turning kitchens, dining rooms and dens into

mini recording studios, they read everything we needed them to read - - and they even added some new publications to our program lineup! And when we re-opened our studios to 50% capacity and established vigorous sanitizing and reporting requirements to keep the COVID virus at bay, they didn't even blink. Today we have volunteers still recording from home and volunteers reading in the studio - the best of both worlds!

And it fits because our volunteers do more than read. In the early months of the pandemic they reached out to hundreds of Listeners by telephone to make sure they were okay, see if they needed anything, and share information, leads and referrals for other support services that Listeners could call on for help.

Your Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service remains focused on growth as it builds capacity to serve even more people who are blind, have low vision or have other print disabilities with the kinds of audio programs they want. Because we recognize the critical role we play in helping them remain fully engaged as active members of our community.

Mike Benzin  
Director of NFRRS





## **Independence Express Transportation Department Director's Report**

WNYIL has been providing transportation for people with disabilities for 40 years. It started with one wheelchair-lift van for the agency, with any of the three able-bodied staff members who was available driving it. Through the years, an actual Transportation Department was developed, and now we have a growing fleet of vans, several drivers plus support staff. Our budget is just over \$400,000 annually and has become a separate division called Independence Express (IE).

IE is currently available to transport people with disabilities in Erie, Niagara, Genesee, Orleans and Wyoming counties with support from various funding sources. For consumers who can use public transportation, we also provide bus passes to people in Erie and Niagara counties through two programs. We offer Fee-For-Service van rides at a cost of \$15 each way, plus \$0.50 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 six wheelchair accessible vans and one minivan to serve people with disabilities in WNY.

In the 2019 fiscal year, IE served 182 people, providing approximately 5,700 trips. 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 178,000 miles throughout the five counties getting people to various destinations of their choice.

We added two new wheelchair accessible vehicles to our fleet, vans #30 and #31. They are both Ford Transit vans, which are very different from the Chevy Express vans. These vans have windows that come down much further and make for a more pleasant ride.

In 2018, we provided transportation to polling places for voting at no cost to people in Erie County on Election Day for the first time. As you know, 2020 was a Presidential

election year and the demand to be able to vote was much greater. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many people chose to vote by absentee ballot, but some folks still wanted to go to the polls. Independence Express helped facilitate voting for 35 people in WNY at no charge in Erie, Niagara, Genesee and Orleans counties. We will continue to do this every year, so that everyone has the chance to exercise their right to vote.

COVID-19 has had a very big impact on how we offer our services; however, we have not stopped providing van rides during the pandemic. We drive and provide bus passes to people who are essential workers and will continue to do so. Also, we have taken many people to doctor's appointments and grocery shopping. As the number of cases of COVID-19 decreased and programs opened, we began transporting people to some safe social activities in August and September.

A new service that Independence Express is now offering is free grocery and medication pickup. And "free" means exactly that: this service is provided at no charge and is available in all our service areas.

These are difficult times for many of us and it is our goal to keep people connected to their community as much as possible. We will continue to provide safe, affordable, dependable transportation in Western New York.

Cathy Colicchia  
Director of IE



# Health Homes Care Coordination Director's Report

## **Vision:**

The Western New York Independent Living (WNYIL) Health Homes Care Coordination Department (HHCCD) 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 improve one's quality of life.

## **It's a team effort:**

WNYIL currently contracts with four Lead Health Homes (LHH) in the Western New York region, including the Genesee, Orleans, Wyoming (GOW) Counties. Those LHHs are: 1. Greater Buffalo United Accountable Health Network (GBUAHN) operating in Erie & Niagara Counties (1 FTE in the ILC Buffalo location). [1 FTE is total work supplied by staff that is one Full-Time Equivalent, meaning about 37.5 to 40 hours per week.]; 2. Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center (NFMCC) operating in both Niagara & Erie Counties (1 FTE in the Niagara County location); 3. Health Homes of Upstate New York – BestSelf Behavioral Health, operating in Erie county (1 FTE in the Independent Living Center - Buffalo location); and 4. Health Homes of Upstate New York (HHUNY) – Huther Doyle operating in Genesee & Orleans Counties (2 FTE in the Genesee Region location). This provides choice to the individuals we serve here at WNYIL.

## **How does it work?**

What does Health Home Coordination do and for whom? The WNYIL HHCCD provides Care Coordination services to ensure all those involved in an individual's care are working together and sharing the information necessary for 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 our consumers' care through effective communication with other providers ... advocate on their behalf so they receive the care they deserve ... navigate the complex healthcare systems ... link them to resources for finding affordable housing, food, clothing, childcare and transportation ... assist them in learning more about meaningful activities to improve their health and to keep them healthy ... and assist the consumers in identifying goals and ensure everyone involved in their care understands those goals and the care plans created for them, to best help the individuals reach those goals.

### **Whom does it serve?**

Eligible consumers 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 consumers in a convenient location of their choice. This can be in our office, another provider's office, in the community, or right in the persons' homes.

Many Medicaid beneficiaries suffer from multiple or severe chronic conditions and can benefit from organized coordination and management of the health and long-term services they receive. WNYIL, through the 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 consumers; 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 identifying a way to get to medical appointments.

### **How have things changed, recently?**

Within this past year, the WNYIL HHCCD has continued to struggle with staff transition, including several separations, as well as the on-boarding of new 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 countless members.

This year, the COVID pandemic added new barriers and threats to the health and well being of those members that we serve. I am proud to say that, due to the nature of care coordination and the technology that we use, we were poised to continue delivery of services without missing a beat. This required a shift in current operations and leadership practices. We implemented and refined the use of telephonic and web-based meeting platforms to ensure communication amongst staff members. This technology and approach were also utilized to maintain constant communication between care

coordinators and members, as well as their identified care team, including social supports, physicians, mental health professionals and social services. This change proved to be seamless for the delivery of services.

Hans Schiffert  
Director of Health Homes Care Coordination

WNY  
DISABILITY  
PRIDE  
2020

Erie County Executive  
Mark Poloncarz has a  
proclamation to celebrate  
the 30th Anniversary of  
the Americans with  
Disabilities Act.

highlight 2a

0:00:09

0:01:33

CART Link: <https://2020archive.1capapp.co>



# 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.

Despite dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic for most of the year, in 2020 we helped 946 individuals apply for Medicaid coverage. We accomplished this through virtual meetings with consumers, as well as using our agency's transportation service, Independence Express, to deliver application packets to consumers, and pick up applications and documentation from them.

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 2020 we helped 1,145 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

**Western New York Independent Living, Inc.**

3108 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14214

(716) 836-0822 (Voice/TDD)

1-800-348-8399 (Toll Free)

(716) 835-3967 (Fax)

**Independent Living Center (ILC)**

**Mental Health Peer Connection (MHPC)**

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**Independent Living of Niagara County**

746 Portage Road, Niagara Falls, NY 14301

(716) 284-4131 (Voice/TDD)

(716) 284-3230 (Fax)

(855) 366-1042 (Toll Free)

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**Independent Living of the Genesee Region**

319 West Main Street, Batavia, NY 14020

2407 N. Main St., Warsaw NY 14569

(585) 815-8501 (Voice/TDD)

(585) 815-8502 (Fax)