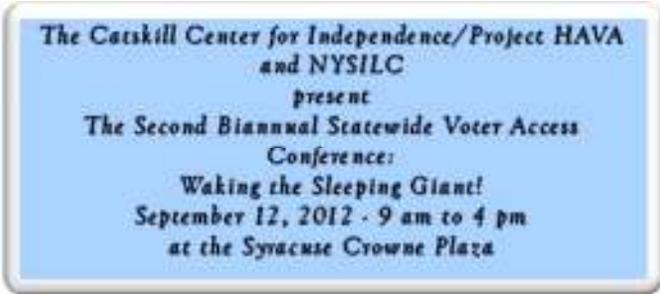


# Every Day is Independence Day

Catskill Center for Independence

Summer 2012



## CCFI Announces a New Program for Schoharie County Residents

*Pamela A. Levy, Employment Specialist*

The Catskill Center for Independence is now offering Assistive Competitive Employment Services (A.C.E.S) to Schoharie County residents who may have a mental health diagnosis and have a desire to enter or re-enter the workforce.

A.C.E.S is an effective way to move people from dependence on a service delivery system to independence via competitive employment. Several recent studies indicate that the provision of on-going support services significantly increases a person's rate for employability and job retention. Assistive Competitive Employment Services encourages job seekers to work within their communities and promotes social interaction and integration.

A.C.E.S Employment Specialists offer interested residents vocational assessment and planning, job placement and career counseling, as well as, time-unlimited follow-along and follow-up services. We will work to develop jobs throughout the County and provide support to both the employee and employer, as needed.

Compensation of at least minimum wage, but preferably at the prevailing rate, is a critical goal of the A.C.E.S program. Job selection will be based on a person's interests and skill set. The Employment Specialists' focus will be on

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For this one day conference we are proud to present Jim Dickson, Vice President of Organizing and Civic Engagement at American Association for People with Disabilities (AAPD), who will help us wake that giant!

Jim Dickson leads AAPD's nonpartisan Disability Vote Project in Washington, D.C., a broad coalition of 36 national disability-related organizations whose mission is to close the political participation



gap for people with disabilities. The project focuses on voter registration and education, get-out-the-vote drives, election reform and polling place access. Mr. Dickson played a central role with the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights (LCCHR) effort to pass the Help

America Vote Act (HAVA). (Photo at left is Jim with his dog.)

For more information call Helen Benlisa, Project HAVA Director at the Catskill Center for Independence 607-432-8000 or email [helenbenlisa@ccfi.us](mailto:helenbenlisa@ccfi.us). Visit [www.ccfi.us](http://www.ccfi.us) to register online.

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maximizing each person's strengths and abilities while encouraging self-advocacy and personal choice.

Each Tuesday and Thursday, our Employment Specialists are located at Workforce Solutions, 795 East Main, Cobleskill New York. You may contact us by calling 1.518.234.4254 EXT: 3024 or toll free at 1.866.724.8666.

For additional information, please contact the Catskill Center for Independence at 607.432-8000.

For those of you not familiar with the program, "Through Children's Eyes" is based on experiential learning modalities popularized by David A. Kolb, John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Jean Piaget. In essence, experiential learning is *learning through reflection on doing*. It became the corner stone of our efforts; a mission to help our next generation of lawmakers, builders, community leaders and the everyday citizens to better understand the importance of accessibility in our communities and in our own private lives. To accomplish this, students are asked to "try on a disability" for an entire day; some sit in a wheelchair, some experience blindness and others, auditory disabilities. The idea is to immerse them into a world of disabilities within the confines of a social structure that rarely accommodates the needs of people with disabilities. This process turns sympathy and lack of information into empathy and a real world understanding and that, in this writers view, will do more for encouraging true inclusive integration in our communities than any disability related civil rights bill has been able to do to date.

The power of the program overwhelms me sometimes and I'm honored to still be a part of it after 6 years! I still find myself amazed at the opportunities we get to work with these tiny advocates in educating our local communities. So when we received a call from Kevin Ritton, Emergency Services Coordinator for The Otsego County Office of Emergency Services we knew immediately...this was another opportunity. Mr. Ritton said that the County received funds through parking tickets issued to folks who parked in designated accessible parking areas without a permit. He further explained that the money was to be used to create an awareness campaign designed to educate people on the laws regarding accessible parking and he was hoping we could assist them in developing such a program. Excited for the opportunity to collaborate with such a great community service, we of course agreed.



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## GO GREEN!

If you would prefer to stay environmentally conscious and receive your newsletter electronically, please feel free to contact us at (607) 432-8000 or send an email request to [ccfi@ccfi.us](mailto:ccfi@ccfi.us).

We also offer our newsletter on tape!

### Little Minds Have Big Impact... and Ice Cream!

*Don Wyckoff, Architectural Barrier Consultant*

As many of you know, the Catskill Center for Independence has had a long collaborative working relationship with Riverside Elementary School in Oneonta. For more than 6 years Riverside and its students have played an integral part in developing the comprehensive experiential disability awareness program "Through Children's Eyes"



(TCE) which has now reached across the nation after being featured in the National Council on Social Studies (NCSS) "Young Learner Magazine". NCSS is a nationally renowned magazine that educates the educators about new approaches and modalities in learning and we were so happy to be a part of this amazing opportunity.

What would we do? Education programs would have to be developed; artwork and catchy slogans would need to be created. There were lots of things to figure out in order to create such a campaign. As we were asking ourselves those questions, Assistant Director Christine Worden suggested “We should work with the Riverside students”...Let the brainstorming begin!

We thought of students coming up with slogans and they could do the artwork...”yeah that’s a great idea” I thought and then immediately called Ken Sider, third grade teacher/professor/instigator and co-creator of TCE. As usual, Ken was eager to work on the project so we continued the brainstorm.

It was finally decided. We would have the students come up with the artwork and slogan and we would do it by offering the challenge and \$50 each for the best slogan and the best accompanying art work and hey, why not an ice cream party at the awards announcement?



Now I have worked many years with Riverside and the TCE project, so I already knew...these students have been taught well and are incredibly aware, well equipped mini-advocates...if anyone could rise to the task, it was Riverside. First we met with 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade Riverside students and explained what we were trying to accomplish. As typical of Riverside students we saw excitement, determination and a healthy dose of competitiveness. I think the best thing I personally receive through this work is witnessing the cultural shift and seeing it when it happens...amazing! It’s that moment when ordinary elementary school students realize they have the power to effect positive progressive change, it’s empowering.

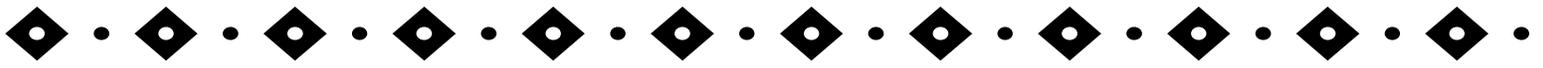
As a reward and to say thank you to all of the participating students, we thought of throwing an ice cream social on the day of the awards. I remembered hearing that Stewarts Ice Cream Shoppe in Oneonta donated ice cream parties to special community events and for various non-profit agencies in the past, so I placed a call. With little more than telling them our story, Stewarts agreed to supply enough Ice Cream to serve 150 students and teachers with an awesome sundae with all the toppings/sprinkles/spoons, napkins and bowls we would need...they even gave us ice cream scoops.

So the day was finally here: Our winners were going to be announced and you could feel the excitement in the air. The students assembled and we introduced Kevin Ritton and an associate of the Otsego County Emergency Services, we thanked all of the students for participating and asked for quiet as we read the names of the winners. And the winners are: For best slogan Shapri Krone, grade 5. Her slogan was “If the Sign is Blue, is it For You? Park Smart”. The winner for best artwork (below) was Eve Rokhvadze, grade 6. They rose to great applause and each was awarded a certificate of appreciation, \$50 credit cards awarded by the Otsego County Office for Emergency Management and, let’s not forget, bragging rights! Soon we will all see their efforts on billboards and educational fliers, as well as hear that slogan on radio public service announcements. Congratulations Ladies!

The Catskill Center for Independence would like to thank, Riverside Elementary Students and staff, The Otsego County Emergency Services, and of course...let’s not forget about the ice cream, Thank you Stewarts Ice Cream Shoppe!



Left to Right: Robert O’Brien, Eve Rokhvadze, (grade 6) Shapri Krone, (grade 5), Kevin Ritton, Don Wyckoff



My name is Bruce Niles and I started at CCFI in May 2012 as an Employment Specialist. I have been married for 38 years and have three grown children. I also have two grandsons. I have worked as a DSS Children’s Services Caseworker in Schoharie and Montgomery Counties for a combined 13 years. I also have been a Medicaid Service Coordinator. I have 18 combined years working with children with disabilities and their families at Clover Patch Program as a social worker and case manager, at the Schoharie County Head Start Program as the Coordinator of Mental Health and Special Services, and at the Schoharie County Department of Health as an Early Intervention Service Coordinator. I am excited about being part of the CCFI team.



Hello, my name is Daniel Goldman and I am proud to have recently joined the staff here at Catskill Center for Independence as a Disability Rights Advocate. I am originally from New Paltz, New York; a small town located about 90 miles north of New York City. Currently, I live in the Norwich area with my fiancé and our dog, Biscuit.

Previously, I worked as a Youth Counselor for the New York State Office of Children and Family Services.

I am a very enthusiastic sports fan for New York sports teams. The Jets, Mets, Knicks, Rangers and Syracuse Orange are my favorites. I enjoy playing sports and spending time with my family and dog.

I greatly look forward to working with the Center and in the community and will provide assistance in every possible way I can.



Hello my name is John Huestis and I started working at the Center in April 2012. I myself have been helped by the Center and would like to help others. I like spending time with my wife and our two dogs Buddy and Reese. I also, like spending time outdoors.

Hello, my name is Dave Ackerman and was proud to join the staff at Catskill Center for Independence in April of this year as their IT specialist. I have worked for the Center in the past and am very happy and proud to be part of the CCFI team again.

I have lived in Otsego County for the past 39 years. I have 3 Sons, 3 beautiful Granddaughters, 4 Grandsons and 5 Great Grandchildren. I own and run a computer business which I have been doing for over 25 years.

Hello, my name is Alyssa Worden. I previously volunteered at the Center and was hired as Clerical Support this summer. The staff have shown me a great deal of support and welcomed me with open arms when I started as Clerical Support Staff. I have a strong work ethic and I hope to expand my knowledge in the advocacy area, as well as, learn more about promoting the independent living philosophy

I have a great interest in this field and enjoy helping people. When I’m not working, you will find me enjoying the outdoors with my family or shopping with my friends. I am very outgoing and I like to keep active. I get most of my courage and my driven personality traits from my mother and without her I wouldn’t be the person I am today. I look forward to learning more as I advance and develop at the Catskill Center for Independence.

## Looking For Work?

Wanted throughout Delaware County, NY: Personal Assistant/Home Health Aides with or without experience/certifications for part-time and full-time positions. Must be at least 18 years old and eligible to work in the United States. Concepts of Independent Choices is the oldest and largest home care provider in NYS and offers competitive wages and benefits. Hours and days are flexible as determined by the consumer/surrogate with hours being authorized by DSS. If you are interested in learning more about this exciting opportunity please contact Rebecca Zohn, CDPAP Upstate Director at 518-459-6422 or via email at rzohn@coicny.org.

## Top 10 Reasons to Register and Vote!

*Helen Benlisa, Project HAVA Director*

The good folks at Non-Profit Vote compiled this great list of reasons we ought to get registered and get voting!! If you are someone who is already registered (good for you!) share this list with someone you know who isn't. Studies have shown many people don't vote because they aren't sure how to register, don't know about the voting process, or are just not informed about how much voting matters to their own livelihoods. Most young people that have not voted say they would vote if someone taught them the ropes. So, if you have a newbie voter somewhere in your life – family, friends, neighbors – offer to help get them registered and, if possible, plan a trip to your polling site together on Election Day!



If we take the “each one, teach one” approach we’ll increase voter turnout and get the younger generation actively participating in the political process. So, without further ado, here are the:

### Top 10 Reasons to Register and Vote!

#### 10. It's your money.

The county commissioners, governor, state officials, legislators and members of congress you vote for will decide how much of our wealth to invest in public services and how to fairly share the tax burden.

#### 9. It's your children's education.

You elect local and state school board members who set public education policy and budgets that will affect how well prepared your children and grandchildren will be for the future. Decisions by our elected representatives also affect the public schools and the quality and cost of higher education as well.

#### 8. It's your job.

Congress, the governor and your legislators influence what job training is available, minimum

wage, pay equity, fairness in hiring, health insurance through your employer, job and pension security, and workplace safety.

#### 7. It's your health care.

Actions by the governor, legislature and congress as well as their decisions on Medicaid, Medicare and private insurance laws determine your access to health care.

#### 6. They're your highways.

Your county commissioners, legislators, governor and members of congress decide what highways are needed, what alternatives to highways such as public transit to support, and how to pay the bill.

#### 5. It's your Social Security.

The members of Congress you elect decide how much payroll tax you pay, cost of living increases and benefit schedules for your Social Security pension, and what Medicare services you receive and share payment for.

#### 4. You live in \_\_\_\_\_.

Your county, state and national elected officials set standards, enforcement strategies and budgets. They plan and zone where roads and industries will be built and how public lands will be used, decisions that can determine how and where you live and work.

#### 3. It's your neighborhood.

The elected officials and judges you vote to retain make daily decisions about crime prevention, laws and law enforcement, safe and affordable homes, traffic patterns, where to put schools, parks and recreation.

#### 2. They're our children.

We do our best to keep them healthy, fed, safe, educated and cared for. The officials you elect can help or hinder all New York families in achieving their goals and dreams.

#### 1. IT'S YOUR DEMOCRACY. MAKE IT WORK. REGISTER AND VOTE!

*From: Nonprofit Voter Engagement Network [nonprofitvote.org](http://nonprofitvote.org)*