

SURVIVAL TOOLS IN THESE ECONOMIC TIMES



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NEW YORK'S ECONOMIC RECOVERY WILL REQUIRE SHARED SACRIFICE

By Melvyn R. Tanzman, *Executive Director*

On the afternoon of November 5, 2008, the day after President Obama's historic electoral victory raised the hopes of real change for groups (including most people with disabilities) that have been marginalized by business as usual in Washington DC, Governor David Paterson held a "Town Meeting" at the Westchester County Center with a focus on the impact of the fiscal crisis on our State's budget deficit. There is no doubt that the era of financial growth, which never benefited our constituency, is over: devastated by the mistakes of the financial community. Now, the average citizen is being asked to pay for these mistakes.

I was privileged to be one of the few to not only attend this forum but also to directly ask the Governor a question. To paraphrase my question, I asked: "Given the State's fiscal deficit, and in light of the President-Elect's commitment to real tax reform, that would shift part of the burden to the wealthiest Americans: Will you consider a fiscal strategy that includes increasing the tax rate on the wealthiest New Yorkers, along with cutting government services? Such a strategy will share the burden of these difficult economic times." Unfortunately, any optimism I might have had on that day was overshadowed by the severity of the economic crisis and the Governor's response. Governor Paterson stated that he was not considering increasing the income tax on the wealthiest because his administration believed that such an action would lead to the flight of wealthy New Yorkers from the State. While I respectfully disagree with the Governor's perspective, I'm not going attempt to counter that view here. Rather, I want to share a balanced perspective on how to address the fiscal crisis. First, I want to note how Independent Living Centers have fared in the State's budget. In the 2007-2008 fiscal year our Centers suffered an 8% cut in funding. That's a loss of about \$30,000 for a Center with a very limited budget. In the current budget proposal from the Governor for 2008-2009, ILCs are not targeted for further cuts; however, last year's funding cuts are not being restored. We thank Governor Paterson for sparing us from further cuts and realizing that "you cannot get blood from a stone."

New York's Fiscal Policy Institute offers a comprehensive strategy for addressing the State's deficit, which is a balanced approach and doesn't place the burden on New York's neediest citizens.

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NEWSLETTER PRINTED BY
MINUTEMAN PRESS OF YONKERS
914-963-2747

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- To close any remaining 2008-09 shortfall, NYS should use reserves including some of the \$1B in the Tax Stabilization Reserve Fund.

- President Obama has included a significant amount of state fiscal relief in his proposed economic recovery package. It is important for NYS's Congressional delegation to fight any efforts to reduce this part of the President's plan.

- Close the bottle-bill loophole so the state receives the deposits from unreturned bottles rather than the industry keeping that money.

- Increase top tax rates on the highest-income New Yorkers as was done in 2003—to raise \$2B to \$7B depending on levels and rates.

Now is the time for all New Yorkers to work together. People with disabilities already know how to survive with less. This issue of "On The Move" shares our perspective on life during these difficult economic times.

EMPLOYMENT, VOLUNTEERING AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

By Scott Barber, Peer Mentoring Coordinator

According to Cornell University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics 14.6 percent of men and women with a work related disability between the ages of 18 and 64 were employed. This means that 1 in 7 people were working in 2008. These are alarming numbers especially in this economic climate when people with disabilities are losing their jobs and are competing for jobs with people without disabilities. The good news is that there are some resources for people with disabilities to assist them with employment issues, like the local One Stop Employment Centers, VESID and of course the Independent Living Centers.

The One Stop Employment Centers have resources that assist in the employment process. You can use the computers to search for the latest job leads from the Department of Labor or you can take one of the many workshops offered at the One Stop Employment Center. You may find it helpful to take a workshop on resume writing or Microsoft Word.

While you are looking for a job you may consider doing some volunteer work. Volunteering always

looks good on your resume and may give you that extra edge you need to get a job. Finding a paying job may require "networking," that is, meeting professionals involved in the area you are interested in. Volunteering helps you network because you will have the opportunity to meet and get to know many professionals in the field. WDOMI's Peer to Peer mentoring will also give you the opportunity to meet with a peer with a disability who has been employed and/or has been through the vocational rehabilitation system. You can also apply for VESID services to assist you in the employment process. VESID orientations are held in White Plains and Yonkers. For more information on applying for VESID call 914-946-1313. For information regarding the Peer Mentoring program contact me at 914-968-4717, extension 24.

Bjelland, M.J., Erickson, W. A., Lee, C. G. (2008, November 8). *Disability Statistics from the Current Population Survey (CPS)*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (StatsRRTC). Retrieved January 13, 2009 from www.disabilitystatistics.org

DISABILITY RENT INCREASE EXEMPTION (DRIE): A LITTLE-KNOWN YONKERS PROGRAM

By Meghan Schoeffling, Systems/Housing Advocate

In these tough economic times, we all have to get a little “Creative” when managing our finances. We have to begin looking into ways to save money or to maintain our ability to support ourselves. For people who are on disability benefits, this is not news. Most of us know there is a necessity to utilize programs that will help us to maintain our independence. However, there are some programs out there that seem to be vastly under-utilized.

One such program is the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE). Back in early 2006 the City of Yonkers enacted the DRIE. This is a program created to assist people with disabilities on Social Security benefits to be able to remain in their homes. In order to qualify for DRIE, you must be a Yonkers resident, as Yonkers is the only municipality in Westchester County which has passed this program so far. You also must be on disability, receiving some form of benefits, and have a rather low annual income. Furthermore, you must live in an ETPA (Emergency Tenant Protection Act) building. One can only figure that part of the reason that this program is not more widely utilized is that the qualifications are so narrow. There are fewer and fewer ETPA buildings in Yonkers and the income limits are so low that a person on the program could not afford the rent to move into the building to begin with in order to benefit from the DRIE. However, this only means that there is room for improvement. For those who can benefit from

the Disability Rent Increase Exemption, it is a great program; however, the eligibility requirements need to be broadened. Also, we should urge our municipalities that have not adopted the Disability Rent Increase Exemption to do so.

At its best, the Disability Rent Increase Exemption will assist people with disabilities to be able to afford to stay in their home. This is accomplished by capping the rent where it is, once the tenant signs up for the program. The tenant will not see another rent increase as long as they stay in their apartment and maintain their eligibility for the DRIE. One such person is a woman who came to our office about a year ago or so. She is disabled and is a Yonkers resident. When she came to our office, she was just barely able to afford her rent, but the landlord gave her a lease with a \$50 rental increase. She was looking to move as this increase would make her rent beyond her means. We went over her eligibility for the Disability Rent Increase Exemption. I assisted her with applying for the program. She was deemed eligible. She was able to stay in her apartment and has the security of knowing that her rent will never go up. Unfortunately, not many Yonkers residents with disabilities have been able to take advantage of the Disability Rent Increase Exemption. Hopefully, by reading this article, people who are eligible will contact our agency so that we may help to determine their eligibility and to assist them with signing up for the program.

**VISIT OUR
WEBSITE**
www.wdom.org

CAN CONSUMER-DIRECTED SERVICES HELP THE STATE SAVE MONEY?

By Mel Tanzman, Executive Director

Okay, we all know that the State and the Country are facing the most severe economic crisis since the Great Depression. As usual, New York State's response primarily relies on cutting government services that are relied upon by low-income people. Advocates for people with disabilities are not only saying don't cut our services, we are recommending using new ways of providing services that save money and increase consumer satisfaction.

The New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) in its 2009 Disability Action Agenda states: "The State should increase access to and use of consumer-directed models of service for community-based long term care to generate structural Medicaid savings."

One such program is the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program that provides home care services under Medicaid. This program

allows people with disabilities to recruit, hire, supervise and fire their own assistants with Medicaid still footing the bill. This program costs the State nearly 1/3 less than traditional agency-directed home care services. In addition, because the program allows assistants to perform tasks that are normally restricted to nurses, savings can be even greater. A nurse is paid more than twice the hourly rate received by personal assistants.

We believe that by investing funds in outreach, training, and transitional services to Medicaid Home Care recipients, more people will use CDPA services, realizing significant savings for the State.

So, if you want to be part of the solution to the economic crisis, consider learning about and participating in the CDPA Program. To learn how you can participate in this rapidly growing movement for consumer control, contact Scott Smith at WDOMI, 914-968-4717 extension 12.

YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By Ann Chiappetta, M.S., Youth Leadership Coordinator

This past year was very important to the young people in our leadership group. One reason was the Presidential election and the other was the continuing economic recession. We all felt that no matter how the election went the world as we knew it would be forever changed. It was distracting but it was also galvanizing in terms of empowering the group's desire to do something positive for themselves and for others.

Once it was official that Barack Obama had been named President-Elect, we managed to settle down and work on the proposed leadership project. The group decided on a food and toy drive to benefit a local food warehouse, The Sharing Community, located in Yonkers. We researched the food warehouse's history, and then worked on organizing a donation drive. The group

decided on the collection dates and times to drop off the donations. One group member made the flyer, and the rest of the group assisted in handing it out.

I asked them to reflect on what helped the most in terms of being part of the group's goals and its desire to help others.

- "It helped me be a better leader," said the quietest member.
- Some of the other members of the group commented that it helped them with improving social skills, to be more outgoing, and kept them focused on what's important in the world.

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As for the future, every group member has expressed a desire to continue being involved in the community. Some of them want to volunteer time for the local food pantries, some want to explore other volunteer opportunities, such as working in an animal shelter or with children. All of them are satisfied that they have made a difference, and that's what our youth group is all about.

We're looking for young men and women with and without disabilities to join our spring leadership groups. Groups meet Mondays and Wednesdays from 4:00 - 6:00 pm and begin March 1, 2009. If you want to know more about the Youth Leadership program or request an application, please contact Ann Chiappetta: (914) 968-4717 extension 37.

**Are you interested in volunteering at W D O M I ?
Please Contact Claudia Slater
at 914-968-4717 ext. 21**

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

By Ellen O. Weinstein, LMSW, Youth Transition Coordinator

We are now in difficult economic times which we anticipate will become more difficult at least for the rest of this year. How do we cope? Yes, with a little help from our friends, family and community.

Share with your close family members your economic difficulties. You are not obliged to give details, just that "things are tight" and wonder aloud what resources may be available. Sometimes even close friends and family do not offer help because they are not aware of your predicament or are afraid of insulting you by offering help. If you open up, they will feel more comfortable asking how they can help. You could ask if they know of good sales, have extra coupons, the location of a food pantry and/or soup kitchen, maybe clothes that they or their children cannot wear.

Speaking of children: It is understandable that parents try to shield their children from economic concerns. However, children are aware of their parents' moods and will notice if family members

are whispering and not wanting them to hear what they are talking about. It is far better to explain to your children in ways they can understand that the family may have to watch what it spends; that they may not be able to have some toys, clothing or snacks that they want. Ask your children for their ideas on how to save money. Let them feel as if they are contributing to the family. Older teens may offer to look for a part-time job or not demand the latest CD or movie. They may start to use the resources of the library and be more accepting of sharing clothing and accepting hand-me-downs.

Your community may have resources that you have not used. Your religious community can be a resource for money, food or clothing. Call our agency, Westchester Disabled On the Move, for more information about community resources.

Be a good family and community member. Share the information and tips that you have received with other family members and neighbors. We are all in this together!!!

MANAGING YOUR FIXED INCOME DURING A TIGHT ECONOMY

By **Scott Smith**, Program Director

Disabled people in general live on fixed incomes and struggle day to day just to survive. Thus it is essential to be prepared for whatever comes financially or otherwise. Similarly, most are used to being marginalized or not considered as a viable part of the economy.

FOOD IS NOT A LUXURY FOR ANYONE.

It is essential for survival. The first step in surviving a financial crisis is making sure that you have food:

Shopping in bulk especially if on food stamps or have limited financial resources can be helpful.

Making a large quantity of food that can be eaten over an extended period of time.

Always have peanut butter and/or bread available.

Utilizing food pantries:

People who are not eligible for food stamps, and/or their cupboards are bare, can go to a local food pantry and find staples such as bread, butter, food, etc. There are even kosher food pantries! Most food pantries do not deliver, you must go to them.

Meals On Wheels:

All residents of Westchester County who are “shut-ins” or over the age of 65 are eligible. Meals On Wheels usually will provide enough food for the entire day and the following day. Meals On Wheels in Rockland County will provide for those who are eligible for Medicaid.

FOUR HELPFUL TIPS

Tip #1: Prioritize monthly bills

To begin, it is important to know what bills you must pay on a regular basis.

The first of these, above everything else besides food, is your **rent**. This is so that you have a roof over your head and can stay warm during the winter months, and cool during the summer months.

If you are having problems with the rent, there are **programs** such as Section 8 Program, and other government-funded programs, that may assist you. You must be eligible for them financially and you **must apply**. There are **agencies** such as Westchester Disabled On the Move Inc. that can help you with the application process.

It is also important to remember that a **threat of eviction** is to be taken very seriously.

Tip #2: Spread out your payments as much as possible

The **rent** MUST be paid **first** before any other bill is considered. (If the rent is not paid, you will run the risk of being evicted.)

The **cable bill** does not, under normal circumstances, have to be paid immediately and/or you can shut it off entirely. There can be payment plans built in. But of course, this depends on the cable company you utilize.

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The **electric bill:** Most electric companies have **special provisions for the disabled.** For example, if you are on a ventilator, and cannot pay the bill, the lights may go off, but the ventilator will stay on. But the electric company must know about your disability and arrange a payment plan with you.

The **phone bill:** Like the electric bill, this can be extended under **payment agreement plans.** However, once you make an agreement with any company, you must make sure to keep up with it. Beware of what you agree to--the company will hold you to your agreement and/or discontinue your service if you do not honor your agreement.

Tip # 3: You can save money

During difficult times such as these, or when money is not available, it is important to **save money for a rainy day.** By this I mean saving

\$5-\$10 dollars a month, just for emergencies. Keep it in a shoebox in the backyard, or a secret location only you know. There are always things that occur, and you never know when they will occur, but they will. This is when we use that extra money we set aside.

Tip #4: Be creative

Many people on a fixed income become very creative. Some crochet, some make earrings or other types of jewelry to make extra money.

People with disabilities are very resourceful and are used to surviving in difficult times (when aren't they difficult?). Maybe we should write and market a survival manual for people who have to learn how to live with less.

YOU CAN HELP WDOMI MAKE ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION IN OCTOBER SPECTACULAR

BY CALLING CLAUDIA SLATER AT 914-968-4717, EXT. 21

**WHO/WHAT'S NEW
AT WDOMI**

By Maritza Hernandez, Bilingual Office Assistant

Hello there! My name is Maritza Hernandez. All my friends know me as "Misa." While I have been at WDOMI for just a little over a year, my newest position is as WDOMI's first Bilingual Office Assistant.

As a native New Yorker, I am proud to have been living my past 32 years here in Yonkers and feel proud of my Hispanic and Native American heritage. In this new position, I have been asked to reach out to not only the local Hispanic community who already know of our services but also to reach out to those who don't because of

the language barrier of not speaking English. As a fellow Hispanic I am only too keenly aware that "family takes on the family" when there are issues of any kind that have the potential to threaten the family's unity. I am here to tell you the services which WDOMI offers to all residents, regardless of age or disability, should be available to all residents regardless of language barriers. So if someone you know is disabled and would benefit from receiving our services, which are *free of charge*, just give me a call and I would be happy to meet with you.

PURSuing AN ACADEMIC EDUCATION DURING HARSH ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES

By Jerry Farrell, LMSW, Youth Transition Specialist

In the mission statement of Westchester Disabled On the Move, Inc., one essential component states: "Create an environment that inspires self-respect." If one were to consider what comprises such an environment, would not a decent place of residence, a living wage job with good benefits and satisfying social relationships be critical?

Because education is essential toward creating such an environment, this article will explore issues that are most important for students in special education, especially in light of current economic difficulties.

Within Special Education an essential element is **Transition Services**. Perhaps the most essential aspect of a good transition plan involves achieving the highest academic education possible. Although not all may achieve the same or at the same rate as others, it appears quite essential that improving basic skills in reading, writing and math is indispensable toward achieving satisfying employment. In light of this, it is most important to remain in high school until either (a) the student achieves an academic diploma or (b) the student remains through their 21st year, as provided by NY state education law, constantly working toward achieving greater academic skills with the aim to graduate with an academic diploma.

The importance of graduating with a high school diploma is evidenced by the following quote within Deeptha Thattai's article "A History of Public Education in the United States."¹ "...The rise in American high school attendance was one of the most striking developments in U.S. education during the 20th century. From 1900 to 1996 the percentage of teenagers who graduated from high school increased from **6** percent to about **85** percent." This statistic underscores the increasing importance of attending and graduating high school with an academic diploma.

¹ Deeptha Thattai is a member with the Cincinnati chapter of the Association for India's development.

In conclusion, it is often stated that things take time; however, as the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and more recently President Obama instructed, there are things that cannot wait. The urgency of "Now" does at times take precedent. After all, what is more urgent than the education of our young adults who will be the leaders and influential adults of tomorrow?

Here are web sites where you may access relevant information regarding special education, employment and vocational rehabilitation.

What is VESID? Vocational Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities

For info look up web address:

<http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/>

and also

<http://www.fcny.org/train/trainhtml/geninfo.htm>

What is the unemployment rate for people with disabilities? Also, what are the new opportunities?

For info look up web address:

<http://www.unitedspinal.org/publications/action/2007/09/04/working-world-low-unemployment-rate-means-more-opportunities/>

and

<http://www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Feature.showFeature&FeatureID=1422>

What is FAPE?

Free Appropriate Public Education

For info look up:

<http://www.fape.org/pubs/index.htm>

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ACADEMIC EDUCATION DURING HARSH ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

Changes to the Individualized Education Program (IEP):

<http://www.idanys.org/index.php?s=3&b-9-18k>

General Information Regarding Special Education in New York:

<http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/>

If need be, please utilize your local library to access the internet.

SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES: TELL US WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT THESE ISSUES BY COMPLETING AND RETURNING THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONNAIRE.

The answers provided will prove helpful for WDOMI to better serve our students.

Please utilize the following scale to rate your responses: write the number in the box provided. As we are aware not all readers are students; we very much welcome all responses. How important do you deem the following:

- 1- VERY IMPORTANT 2- IMPORTANT
3- NOT AS IMPORTANT

A. The role education plays in increasing independence and self-sufficiency?

B. The importance of students being able to spend extra time with their teacher?

C. Improving reading and writing skills?

D. The role education law plays in regard to obtaining an appropriate education?

E. The role income plays regarding access to an appropriate education?

F. The role community agencies play in accessing a good education?

G. Graduating with an academic diploma?

Also, please call or email Westchester Disabled On the Move's Transition workers in regard to your answers to the questionnaire; we want to know your views in relation to these important issues.

Jerry Farrell, LMSW 914-968-4717 Ext.11
Ellen Weinstein, LMSW 914-968-4717 Ext.25

jerryf@wdom.org
ellenw@wdom.org

SOCIAL SECURITY ANNOUNCES . . .

By Sherry DeFrancesco, Administrative Director

The Social Security Administration announces nationwide launch of compassionate allowances, which obligates SSA to identify applicants with serious medical conditions that obviously meet the disability benefit criteria and quickly (within days) approve the disability benefits. This new initiative will fast track disability benefits for people with cancers and rare diseases. Currently there are 50 specific conditions that meet the eligibility requirements, but in time more conditions will be added to the list.

For more information and to view the current list, go to:

www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances

Or call Social Security at 1-800-772-1213 Monday through Friday from 7AM to 7PM.

WESTCHESTER DISABILITY ADVOCACY PARTNERSHIP*

PRESENTS

FRESH FOCUS ON (dis)ABILITY

A FILM SERIES OFFERING A VIEW INTO THE LIVES OF PERSONS WITH ALL TYPES OF DISABILITIES.

Monday, March 2: **Rory O'Shea Was Here**

6:30 – 9:00 pm at the White Plains Public Library, 100 Martine Ave

The story of two young men living in a home for the disabled in Dublin. One has cerebral palsy and his speech is unintelligible to most people, leaving him shy and withdrawn. The other has muscular dystrophy, has only the use of two of his fingers, but is quick-witted and quick to get into trouble. Together they move out of the home and into the community.

Monday, April 6: **How's Your News?**

6:30 – 9:00 pm at the White Plains Public Library, 100 Martine Ave

A documentary chronicling the travels of a team of reporters and crew across America in a hand painted RV. Each of the reporters has a disability ranging from Down's Syndrome to spastic cerebral palsy and their own style for gathering news. The basic approach is "man on the street" reporting and the interactions are sometimes hysterical, sometimes confusing but always honest. MTV has adapted the film for a news documentary series launched in February 2009.

Monday, May 4: **Sound and Fury**

6:30 – 9:00 pm at the White Plains Public Library, 100 Martine Ave

This film documents one family's struggle whether or not to provide two deaf children with cochlear implants, devices that can stimulate hearing. Cochlear implants may provide easier access to the hearing world, but what do the devices mean for a person's sense of identity with deaf culture? Learn about one of the most controversial issues affecting the deaf community today.

Saturday, June 13: **Autism: The Musical**

2:00 – 4:00 pm at the Greenburgh Public Library, 300 Tarrytown Road, Elmsford

One in 150 children may be afflicted with autism. This documentary counters this troubling statistic with the story of five autistic children, their families and the dynamic woman who leads them to defy expectations by writing, rehearsing and performing their own musical. An intimate portrait of these young people and their families as they struggle, and ultimately triumph, through the transformative power of theatre.

Everyone is welcome! All programs are FREE!

Each program will include a discussion facilitated by experts on the topics covered in the film.

Films are captioned for the hearing impaired.

Description can be provided for people with visual impairments.

*The Westchester Disability Advocacy Partnership (WDAP) is a new coalition of over 50 area organizations dedicated to promoting full inclusion for people with disabilities.

For more information or **to request film description or ASL interpretation**, call Meghan Schoeffling, Fresh Focus co-chair, at WDOMI, 914-968-4717; or Robin Osborne, Westchester Library System, at 914-231-3237.

ON THE MOVE
Spring 2009



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Save the Date

Westchester Disabled On the Move, Inc.

Invites you to its Annual Meeting
Featuring a discussion on

“YES YOU CAN”

Inspire Optimism, Advocacy and Awareness

Wednesday, June 17, 2009

Location to be announced

2:00–5:00 pm

Light dinner to follow

Limited seating available

R.S.V.P.

No later than June 10, 2009

To request reasonable accommodations including ASL interpreters

**Call Misa or Joe
914-968-4717**