



INDEPENDENT



NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2023
YOUR INDEPENDENCE IS OUR MISSION

A Letter From The Director

Wow, what an exciting year! We did so many wonderful things this year; parties, celebrations, and of course, hard work. RCAL assists thousands of people each year in some capacity to live independently here in Ulster County. As our 40th Year of Celebration comes to a close, I would like to reflect on all the great and wonderful things that the staff here at RCAL do every day. It is my honor and privilege to work with such fantastic, kind, and dedicated people. As the years roll by, there are changes in staff. Kathy Hochman, our long-term Advocate and Partner, retired as our Chief Operating Officer this year. Kathy has impacted the lives of tens of thousands of people in Ulster County over the last twenty-plus years, and she has influenced state policy and legislation. Hats off to her, and may her retirement be long and enjoyable. Scooby and I, my family, the staff, and our Board of Directors here at RCAL, wish you and your family the best and brightest Holiday Season. Whatever you celebrate, may it bring you joy. We look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

-Anthony Mignone



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Exclusive Interview With Outgoing COO Kathy Hochman by Tanesha Skinner - Olmstead Housing Specialist

I know I am not the only RCAL employee that was saddened at the news that Chief Operating Officer of RCAL, Kathy Hochman, would be moving on to her next endeavor in life. I've admired her leadership role and was inspired to learn as much as I could from her strong feminine wisdom gained from her life experiences. Luckily, for all of us, I was given an exclusive interview with Kathy, using her words as a manual for myself and the RCAL community moving forward.

Kathy began working at RCAL in 1998 as an Employment Specialist. She later worked as the supervisor of the Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) waiver before becoming COO in 2008. She is also a horse breeder and served on the Board of the Onteora School District and the Town of Olive Library Board. Kathy holds degrees in Interior Design & Human Resources & Economics.



Tanesha: Thank you Kathy for giving me the time. You have advocated for so many causes. Your leadership motivates people like myself to take part in bringing change to our community and helping those in need. Hopefully, this interview can continue to inspire others in your absence. You have helped people overcome many barriers, such as with education and disability advocacy. What drove you to pursue your life mission?



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Interview Continued

Kathy: My son had a significant learning disability, and I, as a parent, needed information that led me to educate myself and share my knowledge with other families, educators, and professionals. I aim to continue to provide education and awareness towards equality and inclusion.

Tanesha: That sounds like RCAL's mission statement. You not only witnessed but participated in the progression and growth of community advocacy as well as RCAL's growth and the expansion of available services. What sparked your vision?

Kathy: I never looked at myself as an activist. It was really exciting to start in '98 when RCAL was a small grassroots organization.

Tanesha: Can you recall any positive changes that helped maintain your ambition?

Kathy: Attending rallies and demonstrations where we were almost arrested, being the boots on the ground, was one experience resulting in positive differences. The impact of those changes motivates me to continue to strive to make things better.

Tanesha: An efficient leader is one who wears many hats, As our stylish leader, which hat or title do you wear most proudly? What do you love to do most?

Kathy: I love mentoring young people, I really like to help build confidence, professionalism, and help others with their vision for their future. Having the ability to hold it together when things don't go so well is also important.

Tanesha: Is there a title/hat that you could do without?

Kathy: I'm actually an introvert so leading meetings, chairing committees & events, and attending a number of meetings...





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Interview Continued

...is exhausting to me, but it's very fulfilling to make the effort. It's not the prestige or earning potential that motivates me, it's making a difference in the world and helping someone that needs assistance. I can recall as an NHTD supervisor, I was helping an individual with ALS get an appropriate program for her son with Down Syndrome. In the end, the Dutchess County School District did a cross-county agreement with Ulster County School District to allow him to attend a program in New Paltz. I was overwhelmed with emotion as she expressed her relief that her needs would be met. Although she has passed, her son and I have a lifelong connection and that's what drives my ambition.

Tanesha: Supervising, organizing, and planning are definite traits of a productive leader. The ability to motivate, inspire, and boost morale comes naturally to true leaders and trailblazers. What are some future goals, ideas, and aspirations for

RCAL that you would like to express?

Kathy: I'd like the community that knows and supports RCAL, including our generous financial donors, to continue to grow together. We must continue to serve and educate the community.

Tanesha: What do you think younger pathfinders need in order to motivate and inspire them to create change?

Kathy: My advice for younger pathfinders is to "keep on keeping on." A life well lived is a life worth living and one day you will reach an age when you think of the times that really mattered. We only do this once. Make a difference!

Tanesha: Thank you so much, Kathy. You've made such a difference in my life by hiring me and you truly inspire me to make a difference for others in need...

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Interview Continued

I have no professional way to say that you embody my aspirational hashtags: #Boss #Shero #Goals! But I know someone who does; Katie Clayton, our current NHTD Supervisor. Katie, can you share a few words about Kathy?

Katie: I have learned so much from Kathy throughout my time at RCAL. It has been motivating to see the work that she has done and inspiring to see that our desire to do the work and to think outside the box can be the crux of what makes us excel in what we do. "No" has never been an option when it comes to meeting the needs of the people we serve, and if it has, that means we have exhausted absolutely every possible workaround there is. In my 6 years at RCAL, I only need one hand to count how many times that's happened. Kathy has more than a career's worth of advocacy across multiple programs and roles that have truly impacted and changed

people's lives in our community. It has been a privilege to have her as a mentor, a supervisor, and a friend. I often say that RCAL is where I've grown up, and Kathy will always be someone that I will attribute to having a hand in that.



"I don't have any qualifications to do what I did- but boots on the ground is the best way to learn, just go on and try!" - Kathy



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2024 Budget Advocacy Priorities

A new year means the start of negotiations for a new state budget for the coming fiscal year (April 1, 2024- March 31, 2025). As one of over a dozen Systems Advocates across New York State, I work with the New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL), who coordinates the aforementioned Statewide Systems Advocacy Network. Through a structure of various public policy committees that meet year-round, our collective efforts and concerns form the basis of our annual budgetary, and later, legislative priority agendas. The following is a list of this year's budget priorities. -Keith Gurgui

- Increase base funding for Independent Living Centers in FY 2024-25 to \$18 million and incorporate a statutory cost-of-living adjustment to ensure funding keeps pace with the cost of doing business.
- Address the home care crisis by increasing wages for home care workers to 150% of the State's minimum wage, as outlined in the Fair Pay for Home Care Act.
- Repeal cuts to eligibility for home and community-based long-term supports and services in Medicaid proposed by the Medicaid Redesign Team II.
- Increase funding for Access to Home to \$10 million.
- Require counties to expand paratransit beyond the federal Americans with Disabilities Act minimum.

Read NYAIL's full budget letter to Governor Hochul [here](#).

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The American Red Cross Eastern New York Office

will install up to three **free** smoke detectors in your home through the Home Fire Campaign. Call the Poughkeepsie office at **(845) 471-0200** and leave your contact information.



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RCAL 2023 FriendRaiser Highlights

RCAL held its annual FriendRaiser at Stone Hedge restaurant on Thursday, November 2. Staff were joined by community members, elected officials, friends, and family, to celebrate another year of hard work and to raise funds to continue to do so. RCAL would like to thank all of the silent auction donors and Music Fusion for providing the entertainment for the evening, including a DJ and a wonderful live singer.



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Governor Signs Access to Home Bill, Vetoes Home Care Reporting Bill

On Friday, November 17, Governor Hochul signed A.1686A, a bill that requires the New York State Department of Homes and Community Renewal (HCR) to provide an annual report on the state's Access to Home program. The program provides home modifications to low-income households to keep them at home and out of institutions. However, limited data is available to assess if the program is adequately funded and to what degree it is being utilized, and in what areas of the state. A.1686A compels HCR to provide an annual report that contains data on the number of applications received by, contracts awarded to, and funding provided to local administrators; the number of beneficiaries awarded contracts by local administrators; the average amount of those contracts, and the number of potential beneficiaries denied as ineligible by local administrators.

While the governor signed the Access to Home reporting bill, she vetoed a bill (A. 1926A) that would have required the Department of Health to publish certain information relating to home care services on the department's website on an annual basis. With the ongoing home care crisis, many individuals who are eligible and approved for a certain number of home care hours, wind up not receiving the full number of hours they are eligible for. This legislation intended to collect and make public, how many hours of care eligible individuals are not receiving, to understand and learn whether these numbers are increasing or decreasing over time, and the totality of the gap in coverage (unmet needs) in New York State's home care services system.



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Governor Signs Fair Medical Debt Reporting Act

On December 13, Governor Hochul signed A6275a, the Fair Medical Debt Reporting Act. The bill prohibits credit bureaus from reporting on medical debt. Advocates for the End Medical Debt Campaign, a coalition of over 60 nonprofit organizations in New York formed to reduce the burden of medical debt on New York healthcare consumers, joined the governor for a signing ceremony marking the event.

Their press statement reads in part, "More than 740,000 New Yorkers currently have medical debt on their credit reports. The problem affects low-income New Yorkers, and disproportionately impacts black and brown patients, and is especially pervasive in upstate and rural counties of New York with some communities having over 10 percent of their residents reporting medical debt in the collections process."

The End Medical Debt Campaign has achieved several legislative victories in the past two years, including banning hospitals from placing liens on patients' homes or garnishing their wages in medical debt cases. "Unpaid medical debts are a key driver of negative information on credit reports, causing many New Yorkers to struggle to obtain favorable interest rates, rent apartments, and sometimes apply for jobs," said Kyle Giller, Staff Attorney at the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG).

For further information regarding the signing event, you can [visit the governors website here](#).





78% of Residents Living in Understaffed Nursing Homes

An analysis by the Long-Term Care Community Coalition (LTCCC) of federal nursing home staffing data for the second quarter of 2023 showed that nearly four in five nursing home residents (78.8%) live in understaffed facilities providing less than the 4.1 hours per resident day (HPRD) needed to deliver sufficient clinical care and avoid unnecessary resident harm. For context, each day, more than one million people reside in roughly 15,000 nursing homes across the United States.

Staffing Facts for Q2 2023

- U.S. nursing homes collectively provided an average of 3.66 total nurse staff HPRD in the second quarter of 2023.
- The total nurse staff HPRD for Q2 2023 is up two minutes from Q1 2023 (3.63 HPRD). The increase is driven largely by a rise in CNA HPRD, from 2.00 to 2.04.
- The median nursing home provided 43 minutes per resident day (MPRD) of non-nurse staff, including 8.8 MPRD of Activities staff, 7.5 MPRD of Occupational Therapy staff (incl. asst & aide), and 8.3 of Physical Therapy staff (incl. asst & aide).
- Nationwide, contract staff accounted for 9.7% of nursing staff hours, down from 10.1% the previous quarter. In the median nursing home, however, contract staff accounted for 2.3% of nursing staff hours, indicating that most nursing homes do not rely heavily on contract staff.
- The top five states in terms of statewide total nurse staff ratio are Alaska, Oregon, North Dakota, Maine, and Hawaii. The bottom five states are Missouri, Illinois, Texas, New Mexico, and Virginia.



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Full-Time Office Manager

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS: • Two to four years of experience as an administrative or office manager. • Additional qualification or certification as an Administrative Officer or Secretary

Necessary Skills: Organizational and time-management skills • Analytical abilities • Exceptional attention to detail • Excellent interpersonal skills • Advanced computer skills, with an aptitude to learn new systems and procedures • Minimum of basic knowledge and understanding of computer network operations. • Experience with troubleshooting problems with office equipment such as copiers, printers, fax machines, multi-line phone systems, etc. • Skilled at data entry, and proofreading • oral and written communication skills. • Ability to interact pleasantly with the public and various agencies, even under extreme circumstances.

Administrative Assistant to the CEO

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS: • Two to four years of experience as an administrative or office manager. • Additional qualification or certification as an Administrative Officer or Secretary

Necessary Skills • Manage staff meetings • Organize Board Meetings & Executive meetings • Provide notifications • Grant Assistance - write grants • prepare annual and Semi-Annual reports • Organize tabling events • Organize Staff Outings • Assist with Fundraising • Provide direct support to the CEO • Coordinate staff and Community Events



If you have any questions about a position or if you're not sure if your experience can be considered, please feel free to contact Leah Gherardi, Program Supervisor, at lgherardi@rcal.org.

MORE INFORMATION ON OUR WEBSITE!

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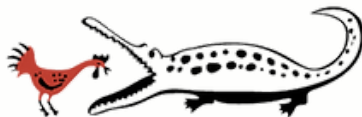
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