



INDEPENDENT



MARCH-APRIL 2024

YOUR INDEPENDENCE IS OUR MISSION

A Letter From The Director

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I am beginning to sound like a broken record, but the team here at RCAL is putting together such wonderful events for this year. We said that we were going to dial it back, but that does not seem to be the case.

A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

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DISABILITY RESOURCE EXPO COMING

STAFF OBSERVE SOLAR ECLIPSE

WE'RE HIRING

Our next big event is this Saturday. In partnership with the St. James Methodist Church, RCAL is proud to host the first Annual Jim Garvey Memorial Disabilities Resource Fair. The Jim Garvey Memorial Disabilities Resources Fair was created to bridge a connection between caregivers and local agency support. This fully accessible expo is co-sponsored by RCAL and St. James United Methodist Church of Kingston. It brings together area agencies and families with loved ones living with a disability, whether a physical, social, emotional, or neurological disability. There are workshops to help caregivers understand OPWDD services and Medicaid funding and a special caregiver session with a mental health professional. An additional highlight will be a teen pride power hour where teens with disabilities can connect and create colorful art.

Roxanne Ferber, NHTD Service Coordinator, collaborated with St. James church on this event. "I am very excited to connect to the parent community in a meaningful way, and I hope the information shared by vendors and our guest speakers will add value to the lives of those we serve in our community," she said. Up next is our BBQ on June 14th and our Disability Awareness Parade on July 20th. Make sure to go to our website and sign up for our mailing list for more details.

Hope to see you Soon,

-Anthony Mignone, CEO



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International Women's Month Spotlight RCAL Founder - Joan Gunderson

RCAL was founded in 1983 thanks to the vision and efforts of one woman; Joan Gunderson. Born in 1948 in Greenville NY, Joan grew up on a farm with corn and cows. She was involved with 4-H at a young age. She recalls regularly showing calves at the county fair as one of several memorable activities.



In 1979, Joan was in a head-on motor vehicle collision involving a drunk driver. She suffered many fractures, as well as a severe head injury. Her injuries necessitated in-patient rehabilitation at Helen Hayes Hospital and a pause in her education. Left permanently disabled, Joan persevered through rehab and regular corrective surgeries. Life now involved navigating a landscape of new attitudinal, social, and physical barriers.

Regardless, Joan attended college in Utica and at SUNY New Paltz for her Bachelor's degree and Adelphi University for her Master's degree in social work. Joan would also meet Sue Hoger, who would later come to lead RCAL, during her studies at Adelphi.



The opportunity to establish an Independent Living Center came after a trip to visit downstate Centers in New York City. Upon the advice of a professor and the help of then State Assemblyman Maurice Hinchey, a state line item was passed in the budget to add 6 more Independent Living Centers in New York. Joan applied with Hinchey's assistance, to create Ulster County's ILC, and the Resource Center for Accessible Living was soon established thereafter.



As we recognize women and the role they play in our lives, and in particular, those living with disabilities, RCAL and the individuals it serves and employs would like to uplift the spirit of perseverance in the face of overwhelming obstacles. Joan Gunderson exemplifies this spirit and we are deeply grateful.

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Career Services Expo

RCAL was proud to join a broad host of service providers at SUNY Ulster on March 14th for an annual Career and Services Expo that provided a day of networking with representatives from an array of organizations to help individuals on the path to post-graduation employment as well as additional educational pathways and to learn about community supports and services. Vendors included: ACCES-VR, ARC Mid Hudson, NYS Commission for the Blind, People's Place, Ulster BOCES Adult Career Education Center, Wraparound Services of the Hudson Valley, and many more.

THE ULSTER COUNTY TRANSITION COUNCIL PRESENTS

Career & Services Expo

Thursday, March 14, 2024
9am-2pm @ SUNY Ulster

Join the Ulster County Transition Council for a day of networking with representatives to help you explore career, post-graduation, and educational pathways, as well as learn about support services. Workshops on ACCES-VR at 10:30am and 1:30pm.

Meet with Representatives From:

- ACCES-VR
- ARC Mid Hudson
- Bank of Greene County
- Bath Fitter DBA Instant Bath
- Hannaford
- In Flight Inc
- LifePlan CCO
- Mid-Hudson SRDC
- NYS Commission for the Blind
- Office of People with Developmental Disabilities
- People's Place
- RCAL
- Sarada Bernstein MPH, Registered Dietician
- STEPs Industry Pre-apprentice Program
- SUNY Ulster
- Ulster BOCES Adult Career Education Center
- Ulster County Area Transit
- Ulster County Career Center
- Ulster Savings Bank
- Ulster Federal Credit Union
- Ulster YouthBuild
- Wraparound Services of the Hudson Valley

Thank you to all our sponsors!

Ulster Savings

Valley Courier and Delivery Service Inc

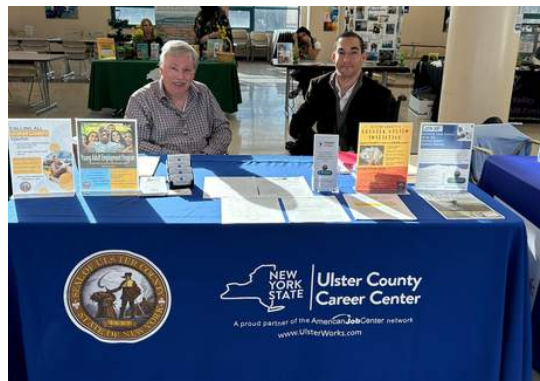
SUNY Ulster

The Arc

Learnner First, LLC

Wraparound Services of the Hudson Valley

The Boardboard Bistro will be open to purchase food and refreshments.





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State Budget Advocacy Update

This year's budget negotiations have been quite eye-opening. Just to recap, we were focusing on several different areas including; Increasing base funding for Independent Living Centers (ILCs) to \$18 million and incorporating a statutory cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), increasing wages for home care workers to 150% of the State's minimum wage as outlined in the Fair Pay for Home Care Act, repealing cuts to eligibility for home and community-based long-term supports and services in Medicaid proposed by the Medicaid Redesign Team II, increasing funding for Access to Home to \$10 million, and requiring counties to expand paratransit beyond the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) minimum.

The Governor's proposed budget and follow-up 30-day amendments included several dangerous cuts and alterations to the state's Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP). One of these proposals would eliminate Designated Representatives from CDPAP, meaning individuals who are unable to direct their care themselves would no longer be eligible for the program. Also on the chopping block was over \$2 an hour of wages for CDAP workers downstate through the elimination of longstanding wage parity standards. No new spending was proposed for Independent Living Centers or Access to Home.

The Senate and Assembly eventually responded with their own one-house budgets, rejecting much of the above cuts and even including a proposed increase in ILC funding as well as the Access to Home Program. In addition, the Senate included ILCs in the Human Services 3.2% COLA. Furthermore, both chambers included language favoring reform of the Managed Care system concerning home care as reflected in the Homecare Savings and Reinvestment Act (S.7800/ A.8470).

On March 25th and 26th, advocates and various grassroots organizations gathered in Albany to highlight the dire need to protect CDPAP and invest in worker wages, rather than cuts. (You can view the day's [news coverage](#) online.) The April 1st budget deadline was extended many times, most recently until April 11th, and will likely be extended into the second week of April. Stay tuned for details on the final budget.

-Keith Gurgui, Systems Advocate





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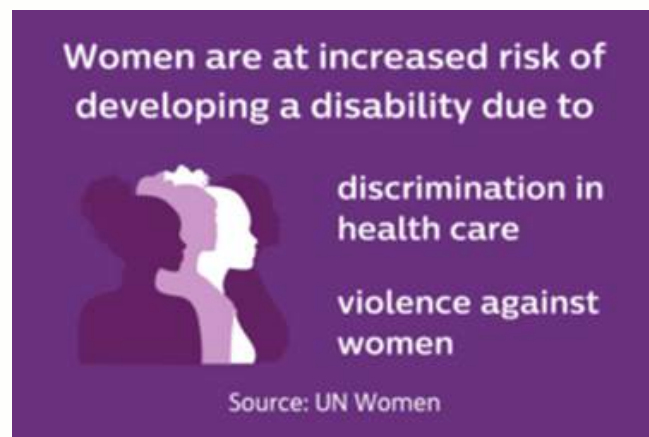
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International Women's Day - Facts & Figures

International Women's Day is traditionally a time to celebrate the achievements and resilience of women around the world. However, it's crucial to recognize and address the unique challenges faced by women with disabilities, who constitute one-fifth of the global female population. As we reflect on the progress made toward gender equality, it's imperative to shed light on the disparities that persist for women with disabilities.

Women with disabilities often face an elevated risk of developing disabilities due to factors such as discrimination in healthcare and violence against women. According to UN Women, these issues contribute to a staggering statistic: one in five women worldwide lives with a disability.

The intersection of gender and disability intensifies challenges in education. Shockingly, women with disabilities are three times more likely to be illiterate than their counterparts without disabilities. This educational disparity perpetuates a cycle of inequality, limiting personal and professional growth opportunities.

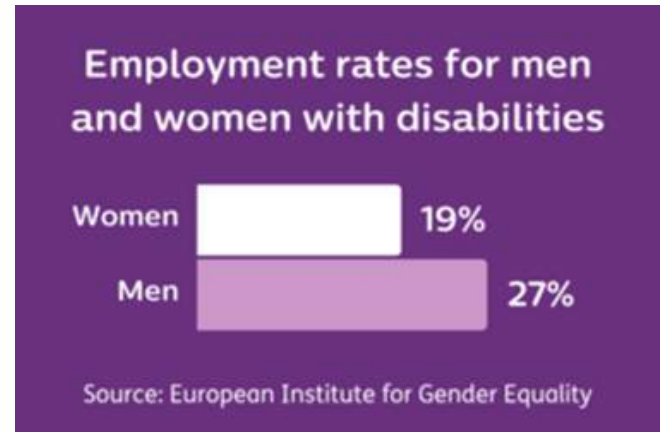


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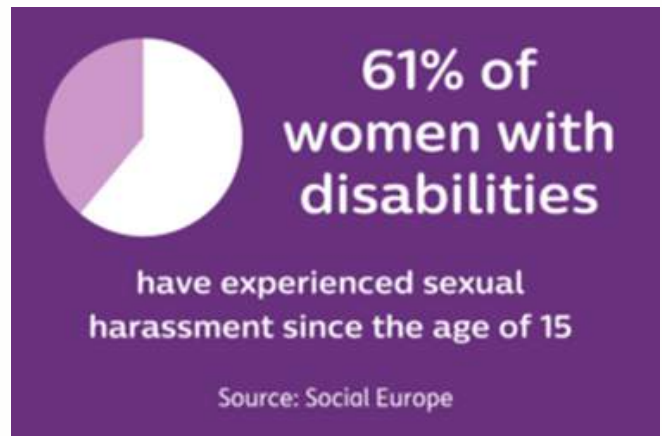
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Facts & Figures Continued

The employment landscape is particularly challenging for women with disabilities. The employment rate for these women is 8% lower than that of men with disabilities, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality. Furthermore, women with disabilities are two times less likely to be employed, creating financial hurdles that exacerbate their overall socio-economic situation.



In an era where digital literacy is paramount, the Internet serves as a gateway to information, education, and employment opportunities. However, women with disabilities are twice as likely to be excluded from this virtual realm, further isolating them from the benefits of technological advancements.



The vulnerability of women with disabilities extends to their safety, as evidenced by Social Europe's report that 61% of women with disabilities have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15. This alarming statistic underscores the urgent need to address not only the physical and economic disparities but also the societal attitudes that perpetuate discrimination.

Source: The Disability Expo



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April is AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH



Local Resources:

<https://www.hudsonvalley-autismsociety.org/>



<https://centerforspectrumservices.org/>



<https://www.andersoncenterforautism.org/>



Other local resources:

<https://hvmag.com/life-style/hudson-valley-autism-resources-camps-programs/>



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Overview of The End Medical Debt Campaign

The End Medical Debt (EMD) Campaign coalition is a growing group of over 50 organizations that meet weekly to strategize, learn about, and advocate for policies that lessen the financial burden placed on individuals after acquiring debt from hospital and/or medical care, with a particular focus on those who are being actively sued or at risk of being sued by medical providers seeking repayment of medical debts from individuals, many of whom are at or near the poverty line. Below, see some of the campaign's policy successes in recent years.

Legislation Passed & Signed

2020: The statute of limitations reduced from 6 to 3 years for medical debt. [N.Y. Civ. Practice Law & Rules §213-d](#)

Why it matters? Interest rates compounded underlying debt substantially over time (e.g., a \$17,000 bill became a \$25,000 judgment).

2021: New York Fair Consumer Judgment Interest Rate Act reduced from 9% to 2% for consumer/medical debt. [N.Y. Civ. Practice Law & Rules §5004](#)

2022: Ban on Medical Liens and Wage Garnishments for medical debt. [N.Y. Civil Practice Law L. & Rules §5201](#) (liens), [§5231](#) (income executions)

2022: Ban on Facility Fees for preventive care & enhanced disclosure requirements for all other Facility Fees. [N.Y. Public Health L § 2801\(12\)](#) (defining facility fees); [N.Y. Public Health L §2830](#) (regulating facility fees)

2023: Uniform Hospital Financial Assistance-[N.Y. Pub. Health Law §2807-k\(9\)](#). (requires hospitals to use a uniform financial assistance application developed by the Department of Health).

2023: Fair Medical Debt Reporting Act (bans the reporting of all medical debt regardless of the amount of the debt.)

Learn more about the End Medical Debt Campaign [online here](#)

Source: Community Services Society



#ENDMEDICALDEBT



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RCAL Staff Celebrate April 8 Solar Eclipse

Staff took a brief break from their duties and gathered outside on Monday afternoon to observe a rare solar eclipse. While we were not in the path of totality, viewers across the Hudson Valley could witness nearly 95% of our Sun being blocked by the Moon during the peak of the eclipse.

Readers can learn more about the April 8, 2024, solar eclipse online at [NASA's webpage here](https://www.nasa.gov/eclipseexplorer).



Photo above: RCAL staff gazes up at the eclipse with protective glasses from the Center's parking lot.

Eclipse Explorer

For a mobile friendly or full-screen version of this interactive map, visit go.nasa.gov/EclipseExplorer.



JIM GARVEY MEMORIAL

DISABILITY RESOURCES EXPO

RCAL is proud to be partnering with St. James Church to bring you workshops, resources, vendors, and more to help you and/or your child live independently in the community.

10AM-2PM

**ST. JAMES METHODIST
CHURCH
29 PEARL ST.
KINGSTON, NY**

REGISTER HERE!



**APRIL
13**



WE ARE HIRING

Respite - RCAL is seeking a compassionate and responsible individual to join our team as a Part-Time Respite Provider. In this role, you will provide care and support to individuals with disabilities, allowing their primary caregivers to take a break and recharge. The Respite Provider will assist clients with daily living activities, engage them in meaningful social interactions, and ensure their safety and well-being during the respite period. Salary range (\$15.50-\$16.50)

Com Hab - RCAL is seeking compassionate and dedicated individuals to join our team as Part-Time Community Habilitation Support Staff. In this role, you will provide direct assistance and support to individuals with developmental disabilities to help them achieve their goals, enhance their independence, and participate more fully in their communities. The Community Habilitation Support Staff will work closely with clients, their families, and other members of the support team to implement individualized plans and promote meaningful engagement and skill development. Salary range \$16.50- \$18.50 (Clean Drivers Licence and own transportation required.)

Interested please contact Leah Gherardi at lgherardi@rcal.org or fill out an application at RCAL.org



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