

DIRECTIONS

IN INDEPENDENT LIVING

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE • SPRING ISSUE 2025



Dwyer Veterans Paint Night, Pg 4

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4TH ANNUAL DIL SCRAMBLE

DIRECTIONS IN INDEPENDENT LIVING



Aug. 16
Saturday | 2025

\$80
Per Player

\$320
Foursome

**Allegheny Hills
Golf Course**

9622 Harys Corners Rd, Cuba

Includes: Greens Fee, Cart Fee, 18 Holes of
Golf, Hot Dog at the Turn, Dinner to follow

REGISTRATION 8:00AM
SHOTGUN START 9:00AM

Prizes & Contests
50/50
Basket Raffles
Longest Drive
Closest to the Pin
Longest Putt

Sponsorships
Birdie \$200
Eagle \$450



For more information, please contact Caitlin Metler at 585-933-0140 or
cmetler@oleanilc.org

ALL PROCEEDS SUPPORT DIRECTIONS IN INDEPENDENT LIVING'S PROGRAMS

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT: Dwyer Veterans Peer to Peer Program

Connections Through Creativity

Dwyer Paint Night

The Joseph P. Dwyer Peer to Peer Program continues to provide veterans in Cattaraugus County with safe, supportive opportunities to build friendships and heal together. Designed specifically to help veterans cope with the effects of PTSD and traumatic brain injury (TBI), the program uses a Vet-to-Vet model that promotes trust and shared experience in a non-clinical, judgment-free setting. Veterans and their families enjoy monthly gatherings like breakfasts, fishing trips, bowling, game nights, and even sky-diving—fostering camaraderie and mental wellness.

One recent highlight was the “Paint Night” held on May 13th at Fusion on Main. This monthly event gives veterans a chance to unwind, tap into their creativity, and enjoy each other’s company in a relaxed, welcoming environment. A huge thank you goes to the incredible Fusion team for always offering warm hospitality and delicious food that helps make the evening special. Gratitude is also extended to Nancy Yehl, who led the painting class with enthusiasm and kindness, making the experience fun and accessible for everyone who attended.

Events like Paint Night are what make the Dwyer Peer to Peer Program so effective—offering meaningful socialization that helps veterans support one another in healing and growth. With complete anonymity and no clinical pressure, the Dwyer Program remains a powerful resource for our local veteran community. We look forward to seeing more smiles, support, and shared experiences at upcoming events. Thank you to all who make this vital work possible!



Employee of the Quarter

Barb Stephan

Directions in Independent Living is proud to recognize Barb Stefan as our Spring 2025 Employee of the Quarter! Barb has been a valued part of the DIL family for one year, serving as our receptionist—a role that keeps her at the heart of our daily operations. From answering phones and taking messages to sending faxes, Barb is often the first point of contact for those who call or visit, and she does it all with a warm, friendly presence.

Barb, a native of Allegany, finds joy simply in working with her team, who she describes as awesome, kind, and supportive. She keeps herself motivated by staying busy and contributing however she can to the success of the organization. She credits Angela and Amanda as major positive influences on her workday and names Angela as someone she looks up to as a mentor.

Barb came to Directions through a job training program and quickly found her place within our caring and capable team. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her beloved dog Lulu, and cherishes memories of family trips to the ocean, especially those shared with her dad.

Congratulations, Barb! Your dedication and kindness make Directions a better place every day.



Life Skills and Laughter

St. Patrick's Day Party

The Directions in Independent Living Transitions Program recently celebrated St. Patrick's Day with a festive and fun-filled party that brought together youth, young adults, and staff for an afternoon of laughter, learning, and connection. The celebration featured delicious Reubens, tasty snacks, lively costumes, and a variety of games and crafts that had everyone smiling. Events like this not only create lasting memories, but also build social confidence and help participants practice important life skills in a relaxed setting.

Serving young people ages 12 to 30 with developmental disabilities, the Transitions Program is dedicated to helping individuals achieve greater independence and success. Whether it's preparing for college or a career, learning independent living skills, or simply building a healthy social life, our staff provide personalized support in both one-on-one and group settings.

Services include College and Career Readiness, Independent Living Skills training, Youth Activity Groups, IEP and CSE advocacy, Employment Readiness, Community Linkage, and developing self-sufficiency. Our goal is to meet each young adult where they are and help them grow toward their fullest potential.

Available in both Allegany and Cattaraugus counties, the Transitions Program is more than just a service—it's a stepping stone to a more confident, independent future. Events like our St. Patty's Day celebration remind us all that learning life skills can be fun, inclusive, and meaningful. We're proud to walk alongside these incredible young adults as they take steps toward brighter tomorrows.





Sip, Stroll, and Savor: 2025 Wine Walk

Sunshine, smiles, and sips made for a perfect afternoon as Directions in Independent Living hosted its 4th Annual Wine Walk on Saturday, May 10th, 2025, in the heart of downtown Olean. With crystal-clear skies and warm spring air, this year's event was a glowing success that brought together community members, local vendors, and wine lovers alike for an unforgettable day of connection and celebration.

Beginning with registration at 12:30 PM in Lincoln Park, participants received their commemorative wine glasses, passports, and wristbands before setting off at 1 PM for a self-guided tasting experience through some of Olean's finest venues. Each stop offered a unique atmosphere and a variety of wines, spirits, and craft beverages to enjoy.

We extend our deepest thanks to the incredible local businesses and beverage partners who made this event possible: Woodbury Winery, Bradford Brew Station, Main Street Winery, Beef & Barrel, Elicottville Distillery, The Eatery, 4 Mile Brewery, East State Wine & Liquor, Ask Design Jewelers, Merritt Winery, Serenhippitty, ASAP Glass, Green Acres Cafe, The Paper Factory, Skin Deep Piercing, Community Bank NA, Beat City, For Crafts Sake. Their generosity, hospitality, and delicious offerings truly elevated the experience. Also a huge shout out to ACME Business and our DJ, Chuck Dawson of Atmosphere Entertainment for their generous contributions.

This year's Wine Walk once again proved the strength of community and the joy of local partnerships. From lively conversations to shared toasts, the streets of Olean came alive with energy and togetherness.

To everyone who joined us—thank you for making the 2025 Wine Walk our most successful yet. We can't wait to raise a glass with you again next year!



A Gold Medal Staff Advance DIL Olympics

A Day of Food, Fun, and Teamwork

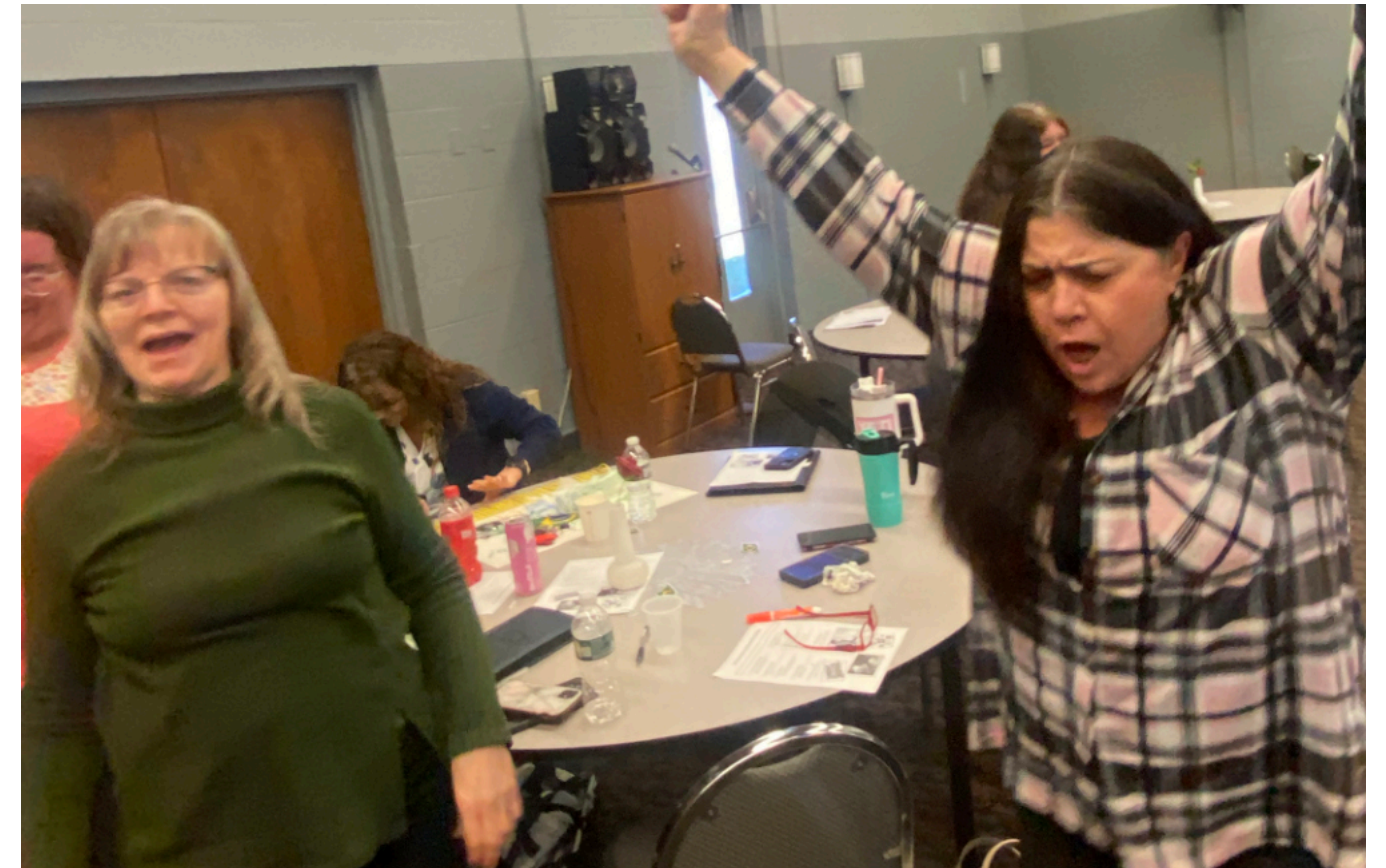
On Wednesday, March 19th, Directions in Independent Living staff came together for our highly anticipated quarterly in-person Staff Advance, and this spring's theme brought energy, excitement, and a touch of international flair—The DIL Olympics!

Held as a full-day gathering, the event focused on strengthening our team through shared learning, laughter, and creative competition. Staff members were grouped into “countries,” giving coworkers a chance to collaborate with colleagues they may not usually interact with during the workweek. The morning kicked off with engaging professional development sessions, followed by team-building activities that sparked new connections and a whole lot of fun.

From the precision of broom golf and the silliness of noodle fencing, to the coordination of rhythmic gymnastics and the nostalgic challenge of the Bozo bucket game, every activity was met with cheers and good-natured rivalry. The gold medal went to Team Brazil, who triumphed with teamwork, spirit, and a lot of laughs.

The DIL Olympics reminded us that while our roles may differ, our goals are shared—and that great things happen when we come together in a spirit of camaraderie and purpose. Events like this not only enrich our workplace culture but also strengthen the bonds that make Directions in Independent Living such a supportive and dynamic team.

Congratulations to all who participated and helped make the day a resounding success! Let the countdown begin for next quarter's creative challenge!



Featured Consumer for March

Heidi Fisher

Directions in Independent Living is honored to recognize Heidi Fisher as our March Consumer of the Month from the Compeer Program. Heidi lives with her husband and is a proud mother and grandmother. Her son, Zachary, lives just a block away and works programming CNC machines. Her daughter, Samantha, a dedicated CNA, is working toward her nursing degree while raising her three sons in Seneca Falls.

As a child, Heidi dreamed of becoming a teacher, and later pursued a degree in criminal justice—coming just three classes short of graduating. Her hobbies include dancing, board games, and movies. Before a life-changing accident, she also enjoyed motorcycles and snowmobiles. Despite the challenges, including a two-month drug-induced coma, Heidi now walks and actively participates in life with incredible resilience and grace.

Heidi is a passionate Compeer volunteer, driven by a deep empathy instilled in her by her beloved grandfather “Poppy,” a WWII veteran who taught her the value of helping others even in adversity. She treasures time spent with her dogs—Gracie, Jigger, and Jack—and loves cheering on the Cowboys, Bills, Rangers, and Sabres.

Through Compeer, Heidi has found a renewed sense of purpose and joy. The program gives her the opportunity to give back, offering support and friendship to others in their mental health journeys. Heidi’s story is one of courage, connection, and compassion. Her greatest wish? To one day write a book about her life—to inspire and uplift others, and to remind us that everything happens for a reason.



Featured Consumer for May

Myranda “Lynn” Cox

Directions in Independent Living is proud to celebrate Myranda Cox, affectionately known as Lynn, as our May Consumer of the Month from the Transitions Program. Myranda lives with her loving and fun family—mom, dad, siblings, and several beloved pets. From a young age, she dreamed of becoming a teacher, and today, she’s making that dream a reality by attending college.

Myranda credits her teacher, Mrs. Mest, as a major influence and says her desire to be kind to others drives her passion and goals. She volunteers at the SPCA with her Transitions worker and loves participating in fun events, especially crafts and social activities. Her favorite place to visit? Home, where her pets and family bring her joy.

Through the Transitions Program, Myranda has found the support she needed to thrive—making friends, building social skills, and staying focused on her educational goals. She says the program’s fun events and dedicated staff helped her become more confident and socially connected.

Myranda’s favorite song is “Boo’d Up,” and her favorite basketball team is the Bonnies. If granted one wish, she says she’d love to be 21. In ten years, she sees herself living independently with her own house and animals—living the life she’s working so hard to build.

The Transitions Program empowers youth and young adults with developmental disabilities through skill-building, advocacy, and community engagement. We’re honored to support Myranda on her journey.






IS HEALTH HOME RIGHT FOR YOUR CHILD?

Like many New York families, you have a lot going on. If you are feeling overwhelmed or if you have had difficulty finding the resources or support you and your family need, New York's Health Home Program can help.

If your child has Medicaid, and if your child has chronic health, mental health, or substance use issues, then your child may be eligible for Health Home Care Management Services.

What is Health Home and how can it help your family? Learn more below.

WHAT IS THE HEALTH HOME PROGRAM?

Many children receive health benefits through the Medicaid program. Most children are generally healthy. However, others face chronic health or other issues that may result in frequent appointments, or an additional need for services or community resources. Without access to these services, it is hard for New York families to stay healthy. New York State's Health Home program was created with these people in mind. The goal of the Health Home program is to help children and their families get the care and services they need, **through the assistance of a Care Manager that will help families coordinate what is needed.**

WHAT IS A HEALTH HOME? IS IT A PLACE?

No. A 'Health Home' is not a place; it is a network of providers **led by a Care Manager** that work together to assist children who have many needs, to help them stay healthy in their homes and communities. Joining a Health Home can help ensure that you and your family receive the care and services needed to stay healthy. Once you are enrolled in a Health Home, you will be paired with a Care Manager. Your Care Manager will work with you to determine if your child is eligible, **enroll your child, complete an assessment, and set up a care plan.** This plan will connect you to the services your child needs.

Some of these services may include:

- **Doctors**
- **Peer advocates who have been through what you or your child are going through**
- **Specialized Treatment**
- **Housing-related support**
- **Resources to access food**
- **Transportation to appointments**
- **School-related services**
- **And other community programs**




HOW DO I KNOW IF HEALTH HOME IS RIGHT FOR MY CHILD?

If your child is a Medicaid recipient or you believe your child may qualify for Medicaid, you may qualify for Health Home. To know if Health Home is right for your child, think about the following questions:

- **Does your child have chronic or mental health conditions for which he/ she needs regular care?**
- **Has your child been in the emergency room or hospital in the past six months? Twelve months?**
- **Do you have difficulty keeping medical appointments for your child?**

If yes, you may be eligible for Health Home services.

WHAT ARE THE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS TO JOIN HEALTH HOME?

Health Homes are for people with Medicaid who have two or more chronic conditions. Chronic conditions may include mental health, substance use disorder, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and being overweight, in addition to others. HIV/AIDS and having experienced significant trauma can also qualify a child for Health Home.

IS THERE A COST WITH JOINING A HEALTH HOME?

No. Joining a Health Home and being paired with a Care Manager is free for those who qualify and are on Medicaid.

HOW CAN I ENROLL IN A HEALTH HOME?

Talk with your current service provider or contact a Health Home at any time to ask if you qualify to join a Health Home and be paired with a Care Manager. You can also be referred by your Managed Care plan, doctor, specialist, hospital emergency room or discharge planner, or Social Service District. Email HHSC@health.ny.gov for more information on a Health Home near you.

COMPEER Cultivates Fun: Growing Bonds

On May 9, 2025, the Compeer program, a unique friendship initiative designed to foster connections between volunteers and individuals receiving mental health treatment, hosted a delightful gardening workshop. Participants gathered to create their own personalized planter boxes, selecting their favorite flowers to cultivate and arrange. This hands-on activity was not only therapeutic but also provided a fun opportunity for participants to express their creativity and connect with others.

In addition to the planting activity, the workshop featured a lively garden trivia game that brought everyone together in friendly competition. It was a fantastic way for participants and volunteers to learn together and enjoy some lighthearted fun.

The Compeer program pairs trained volunteers with individuals receiving mental health treatment, offering one-on-one companionship and support. Volunteers undergo background checks, reference checks, and fingerprinting, as well as comprehensive training, ensuring they are well-prepared to engage in meaningful relationships. Activities, chosen together by volunteers and participants, range from fishing and shopping to hiking or watching a movie, fostering an environment of mutual respect and companionship. Volunteers also benefit from ongoing training and support from Compeer staff.

This workshop not only allowed participants to cultivate flowers but also helped nurture the bonds of friendship, reinforcing the Compeer mission to promote well-being and joy through connection and shared experiences.



About our Agency

Directions in Independent Living is a non profit organization with locations in Olean and Wellsville New York. Directions helps people with disabilities live more independent lives. We have over 17 individual programs that specialize in many different areas or needs that these individuals may struggle with in their daily lives. The Directions organization has been described by its consumers as "understanding, supportive, accommodating, and family oriented."

Every year, more than 1 in 5 New Yorkers has symptoms of a mental disorder, are stricken with poverty, or on the verge of homelessness. Moreover, in any year, 1 in 10 adults and children experience mental health challenges serious enough to affect functioning in work, family and school life. Also, nearly a quarter of veterans (22 percent) in New York state, were found to have a probable diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder and/or major depression. Compared to similar individuals in the general population, the veterans studied were at an eight-fold greater risk of probable PTSD and a two- to four-fold greater risk of major depression.

While many services are available to those in need, more than 40 percent of those in need of services or help report being unaware of what help is available or uncertain about how to navigate the systems that provide assistance. Outreach to connect these individuals with services and better coordination among government and community agencies is needed. We need a more combined effort put into connecting consumers with care coordinators who can provide personalized assistance across a range of service sectors. The existing system often misses those people most in need of outreach or those who have not yet connected with any assistance organizations.

That is why Directions in Independent Living was founded over 30 years ago. It is only through the generosity of people like you, that we are able to continue to serve, assist, and help our friends, neighbors, and veterans that are in need.

If you would, please consider making a donation, referring someone that might be in need of our services, or even volunteer yourself as a helper for one of our programs.

SCAN HERE TO DONATE



Helping those with disabilities live more productive lives.

ACCEPT INCLUDE EMPOWER

OLEAN: 716-373-4602 | OLEAN HOLIDAY PARK: 716-379-8670 | WELLSVILLE: 585-296-3408

Serving Allegeny and Cattaraugus Counties in WNY, and limited areas of Chautauqua Cty as well as McKean and Potter Ctys in PA