

DIRECTIONS

IN INDEPENDENT LIVING

QUARTERLY MAGAZINE • WINTER ISSUE 2024



Christmas Parades, Pg 4

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DIRECTIONS in INDEPENDENT LIVING
Presents

\$35 Per Person
TICKETS MUST BE PURCHASED PRIOR TO EVENT

Located in Historic Downtown Olean NY in the Union Street Area!

Registration table will be located in Lincoln Park by the sign. Pick up your bracelets and passports there at 12:30pm. No wine will be served until 1pm.

4th Annual WINE WALK

**May 10th, 2025
1 - 4pm**

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT:
716-379-8670 x8833
wadkins@oleanilc.org
www.oleanilc.org

REGISTER HERE

A square QR code located at the bottom right of the poster, next to the text 'REGISTER HERE'.The logo for DIL, inc. features a stylized blue 'D' with a white swoosh underneath it, and the text 'DIL, inc.' in blue below the 'D'.

Directions Agency Spreads Holiday Cheer

On November 27th, Directions in Independent Living staff, along with the Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veterans Program, came together to create a festive and eye-catching float for the annual Olean Santa Claus Lane Parade. Using blingy, shiny holiday decorations, the team crafted a bright and cheerful display that captured the spirit of the season. The fun didn't stop in Olean!

On November 30th, The group also participated in the Prancing Down Portville Parade in Portville, spreading even more holiday cheer to the community. Their dedication to making the season merry and bright was evident in the effort they put into decorating and representing both Directions and the Dwyer Program.

A huge thank you to everyone who contributed their time and creativity to making the floats a festive success! Your efforts brought joy to the community and made this holiday season extra special. Great job, team!



Employee of the Quarter

Erika Bauer

Directions in Independent Living is proud to recognize Erika Bauer as the Employee of the Quarter! With approximately four years of dedicated service, Erika has been an essential part of the organization, ensuring that consumers receive the transportation services they need with care and efficiency.

As the Transportation Support Services Lead, Erika is responsible for scheduling, vehicle maintenance, and coordinating transportation for consumers. She also assists other departments when needed, always demonstrating teamwork and dedication. One of her favorite projects is the Transportation Club, which provides consumers with opportunities to experience new things, develop independence, and work toward their personal goals in the community. Seeing their growth has been one of Erika's greatest joys.

Erika finds daily inspiration from the individuals she serves, and she deeply appreciates the support and encouragement from the Family Support Services team. She credits Deb Coble, Kate Steigerwald, and Krissy Wagner as major influences in her professional and personal growth, highlighting their leadership and mentorship.

Since joining Directions, Erika has advanced through multiple roles, gaining experience and leadership responsibilities. Her advice to others? Keep an open mind, be willing to learn, and never doubt yourself!

Congratulations to Erika Bauer on this well-deserved recognition, and thank you for your outstanding contributions to our team!





PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: COMPEER

Together Creating Lasting Memories

COMPEER Art Event

Recently, the COMPEER program hosted an inspiring event that celebrated the power of friendship and creative expression. COMPEER is a unique initiative that matches dedicated volunteers with individuals receiving mental health treatment. Every volunteer is carefully selected through comprehensive background checks, fingerprinting, references, and a structured training regimen. This process ensures that every participant feels safe and supported as they build a genuine one-to-one connection with a volunteer Friend.

During the event at the local arts council, participants engaged in a delightful air-dry clay workshop led by the talented Violet. Attendees crafted beautiful clay hearts, each piece reflecting personal creativity and emotion. The workshop offered an opportunity not only to explore artistic talents but also to spark conversations about upcoming Valentine's Day events. Many participants expressed how much they appreciated the supportive environment and the freedom to decide whether to take their artwork home or gift it to someone special.

Beyond the creative session, the event highlighted the ongoing commitment of COMPEER volunteers who continue to receive training and educational support from dedicated staff. This heartfelt gathering reinforced the importance of connection, understanding, and community, leaving lasting impressions on everyone involved. Friendship blossoms with every encounter.



Life Skills Development

Cooking Class

On January 6, 2025, Directions in Independent Living's Transitions Program hosted a hands-on cooking class at Christ United Methodist Church. Participants worked together to prepare homemade burgers and French fries while developing essential life skills in a fun and supportive environment.

The event emphasized teamwork and kitchen safety, with attendees learning the importance of communication, collaboration, and following safe food-handling practices. From prepping ingredients to cooking and cleaning up, each step encouraged independence and practical skill-building. The homemade meal was not just a delicious reward but a symbol of the confidence and abilities the participants gained through the process.

The Transitions Program is designed to support young adults with disabilities in developing the skills they need for greater independence. Through activities like cooking, budgeting, social engagement, and job readiness training, participants build confidence and prepare for everyday life challenges. Events like this cooking class help foster self-sufficiency while encouraging social interaction in a welcoming community setting.

For more information about the Transitions Program and upcoming events that promote independence and life skills, contact Directions in Independent Living.



Sharing Holiday Joy

Winter Staff Advance

A Day of Food, Fun, and Teamwork

The Winter Staff Advance Christmas Party was a festive and fun-filled event held on December 18, 2024, at Christ United Methodist Church in Olean. Staff gathered to celebrate the holiday season, enjoy great food, and participate in exciting team-building activities.

A highlight of the event was the presentation of the DIL Employee of the Quarter Award to Erika Bauer, a hardworking and dedicated Transportation Specialist. Her commitment to ensuring reliable transportation for those we serve made her a deserving recipient of this recognition.

The celebration featured several engaging activities, including the Reindeer Antler Game team-building exercise, a Best Dressed Contest, and a spirited scavenger hunt. These friendly competitions brought plenty of laughter and holiday excitement.

Adding to the festive atmosphere was an excellent lunch provided by Angie's Restaurant in Olean, which everyone enjoyed. The event was filled with holiday cheer, camaraderie, and appreciation, making it a wonderful way to wrap up the year.

Thank you to everyone who attended and helped make this celebration so special. Here's to another successful year ahead!





PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: DWYER PEER TO PEER

Heartwarming Holiday Dinner Dwyer Veterans

On December 18, 2024, the Dwyer Veteran Peer Program hosted a heartwarming holiday ham dinner at Christ United Methodist Church. Despite heavy snowfall, 65 veterans and their support companions gathered to enjoy a festive meal, camaraderie, and the spirit of the season.

The event provided an opportunity for veterans to connect, share experiences, and support one another in a welcoming and understanding environment. The evening was filled with gratitude as attendees expressed appreciation for the dedicated efforts of those who made the gathering possible. A heartfelt thank-you goes out to the hardworking volunteers who handled setup, cooking, and cleanup, ensuring a warm and inviting atmosphere for all.

This event was made possible through the generosity of community donors, including Carol Merkle, Jon & Liz Conner, Brian Maull & Amber LaRue, Terry Vaughn, Lou & Jeff Harrison, TOPS Friendly Markets, Olean Food Barn, and Directions in Independent Living, Inc. Their contributions helped create a memorable evening that underscored the importance of community support for our local veterans.

The Dwyer Veteran Peer Program remains committed to providing ongoing peer support and fostering connections among those who have served. For more information about upcoming events and resources, visit Directions in Independent Living.

MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY PROGRAM

Featured Consumer for January Shannon Rixford

Directions in Independent Living is proud to recognize Shannon Rixford as the Consumer of the Month for January. Shannon, who also goes by the nickname Shanna Bananna, lives in Olean, NY with her fiancé, two children, and mother-in-law. She describes her family as incredibly supportive, which has played a key role in her personal journey.

As a child, Shannon dreamed of becoming a musician or a chef, reflecting her deep love for creativity. Today, she expresses that creativity through her favorite hobbies: painting and coloring. In addition to art, Shannon enjoys spending time at the beach, which remains her favorite travel destination. She shares her home with her dog, Liberty, who brings joy to her life.

Shannon is passionate about mental health awareness and actively gives back to the community by volunteering at a food bank. She describes herself as crafty and finds inspiration in her father, who has instilled in her the values of hard work and perseverance.

Directions in Independent Living has supported Shannon by helping her with anger management and self-confidence, which has allowed her to focus on her home life and personal growth. She envisions a bright future for herself—continuing school or working part-time, living in her own home, and traveling.

With determination and the right support, Shannon is making strides toward her goals. Congratulations to our Consumer of the Month!



Featured Consumer for February

Kayleigh Padgett

Directions in Independent Living is proud to highlight Kayleigh Padgett as our Community Habilitation Program Consumer of the Month! Kayleigh's dedication to gaining independence and exploring new opportunities exemplifies the spirit of our program.

Kayleigh, affectionately known as Kay Kay, Baby, or Pumpkin, resides in Belfast, NY, with her mom and stepdad. Her family is spread across the country, with siblings living in California, Idaho, and Oklahoma, where her biological father Jeff lives. Kayleigh holds a special bond with her father and enjoys visiting him in Oklahoma, her favorite travel destination.

As a child, Kayleigh dreamed of having a real job — a goal she's now pursuing through her involvement with Directions. She volunteers at the SPCA, showcasing her passion for helping animals. At home, she cares for her dog Aliyah and her crazy hamster Lena, adding warmth and humor to her daily life.

Kayleigh's favorite hobby is sewing, and she enjoys unwinding by watching movies. She proudly cheers for the 49ers, showing her team spirit. When asked about her long-term goals, Kayleigh expressed a desire to gain independence and eventually move out on her own.

Working with Directions has helped Kayleigh build social connections and friendships, allowing her to step out of her comfort zone. She appreciates the safety and encouragement provided by her Transition Specialists and Community Habilitation Staff, who have supported her in exploring new experiences.

Kayleigh's story is an inspiration, reminding us that with the right support, dreams of independence can become reality. We are so proud to celebrate Kayleigh and all she has accomplished!

Congratulations, Kayleigh, on being our Consumer of the Month!



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.

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