

2020 – 2021

Annual Report

**A Year of
Adjustments & Perseverance**

*Westchester
Independent Living Center*

*Satellite Office
Putnam
Independent Living Services*



MISSION STATEMENT

The Westchester Independent Living Center is a peer-driven, community-based organization that empowers people with disabilities to lead self-directed lives in the community through advocacy, training and referral to resources that promote Independent Living.

VISION STATEMENT

Promoting full community inclusion for people with disabilities by breaking down barriers.

“There is nothing I have accomplished without reaching out to empower others.”

Justin Dart
Disability Rights Movement Icon
Father of the ADA

Executive Director's Message

In January of this year, I became the new Executive Director of WILC. I clearly remember when I made the decision to express my interest in applying for the position. I knew I would have big shoes to fill. Joe Bravo had been WILC's Executive Director for 40 years – since the inception of the Center. This was one of the scariest decisions I have ever made but, after working at WILC for 20 years, the last 2 years as Deputy Executive Director, and being the beneficiary of Joe's leadership, guidance, and experience, I felt I was ready and up to the task of assuming the reins and continuing the growth of the Center. Ultimately, it was one of my most rewarding decisions.

The staff at WILC is exceptionally experienced and dedicated. Even with the pandemic continuing this year, WILC staff was able to deliver quality services and, more often than not, went above and beyond to assist the people we serve. This is evidenced by the information contained in this Annual Report. Staff at both WILC and PILS worked on a hybrid schedule. We continued to offer our Food Insecurity Program providing gift cards to those in need of financial assistance for food. We offered various ZOOM meetings and support groups to assist with isolation prevention and to offer/provide social and/or educational activities. Our Parent Training and Educational Outreach Program worked closely with families of children with special needs and local school districts to ensure these children's educational needs were being met. Our Open Doors Transition, Nursing Home Transition and Diversion Waiver, and Traumatic Brain Injury Waiver Programs continued to transition nursing home residents out of nursing homes and into the community despite not having physical access to the nursing homes. The Center's Independent Living Services, Olmstead Housing Program, NY Connects Program, Peer Integration Program, Minority Outreach Program, and Re-Entry Program all provided top notch services despite restrictions and obstacles being placed in their way on a daily basis.

As I look back over this year, I am proud of what we have accomplished. I am honored to have had the opportunity to direct and work with WILC's capable, stalwart, and devoted staff. New projects and programs are in the works and I look forward to the coming year. Until then, be well.

Margaret Nunziato
Executive Director

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Shelley Klein, PhD –
President

Jennifer Johnson –
Vice President

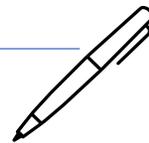
Jesse Sahagan –
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Marna Solarsh –
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Richard Keller
Frank Mastroianni
Dylan Emmons
Alana Cohen
John Boyle

Westchester Independent Living Center, Inc. (WILC) was incorporated in 1981 as a private, nonprofit (501c3) agency and is funded as a Center for Independent Living by both federal and state governments. WILC serves people with disabilities, their families, businesses, schools, and community agencies.

President's Message



To say that this was a year like no other would be begging the obvious. But it was truly a year that WILC's dedicated staff and Board of Directors can rightfully be proud. We started the year with new leadership when Margaret Nunziato, then Deputy Executive Director, took over the leadership of WILC upon the retirement of Joe Bravo, beloved Executive Director of WILC for more than 40 years. Margaret has proven herself to be an able and worthy successor to Joe and, as you will read in this report, our Center has grown in both funding received and number of people served over the course of her first year at the helm; this despite the difficulties of operating in the strange new world-order imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you read through the report, you will learn how WILC combatted food insecurity, helped families to meet the educational needs of their children in special education, provided on-line support groups to combat loneliness and isolation, created new housing initiatives, transitioned or diverted hundreds of people from nursing homes, and so much more. All this while keeping true to WILC's mission to empower people to live self-directed lives in the community through advocacy and training. And to top it all off, Steve Serio, who plays for the New York Rollin' KNICKS Wheelchair Basketball Team, co-sponsored by WILC and the New York KNICKS, played with the USA Men's National Wheelchair Basketball Team at this year's Paralympics and, as Co-Captain led his team to a Gold Medal!

None of this would be possible without Margaret's outstanding leadership and the Center's hardworking, dedicated, and creative staff. They make a positive difference in the lives of the people WILC strives to serve. With many new projects on the horizon for the coming year, we can look forward to another year of life-changing services for our consumers.

Shelley Klein
President, Board of Directors

Consumer Stories

The consumer is a 52 year old Asian female with Aplastic Anemia, Avascular Bacrisus, Schizophrenia, and Depression. In April 2019, she had been evicted from her apartment. She was placed in Samaritan House but had difficulties there. She then opted to stay at the Grace Church shelter in White Plains. When it was closed due to the pandemic, the consumer was forced to live in her car. WILC's IL Advocate assisted the consumer is applying for Supplemental Security Income and completing a SPOA (Single Point of Access) application to obtain Mental Health services. The application for SSI was approved and now the consumer is receiving services from the Department of Community Mental Health. She was approved for SPOA housing and is living in an apartment in White Plains. She is now looking forward to better days ahead.

The consumer is a 54 year old African American male with Traumatic Brain Injury and Mental Illness. He was referred to MOP for Anger Management. He started Anger Management in the group, but it became clear to MOP staff that due to his disability, if he was going to complete the program, he would need the training to be 1:1 and he was provided 1:1 training. The consumer did successfully complete the program. MOP staff assisted him with his goal of obtaining employment. They assisted him with applications as well as educating him on his rights as a disabled person applying for employment. He obtained a job at the Christmas Tree Shop and is working full time. MOP staff also referred him to WILC's TBI Waiver Program for housing assistance and community services that will help keep him safe in the community.

A Year of Adjustments and Perseverance

Core Services

- Benefits and Entitlements Advisement
- Information and Referral
- Community Outreach
- Peer Advisement
- Independent Living Skills
- Individual and Systems Advocacy
- Deaf Services
- Equal Access/ADA Consultation

Total Persons Served During Year

People with Disabilities	4,682
Family Members/Significant Others	909
Other Non-Disabled (Includes Agency/Business Personnel)	871
Business/Agencies	246

Specialized Programs

- Minority Outreach (MOP)
- Mental Health Advocacy
- Educational Advocacy
- Nursing Home Transition and Diversion/ Traumatic Brain Injury RRDC for the Lower Hudson Valley Region
- Nursing Home Transition and Diversion/ Traumatic Brain Injury RRDC for the New York City Region
- Open Doors Transition
- NY Connects/No Wrong Door
- Parent Training and Information
- Peer Integration (PIP)
- Olmstead Housing
- Partners for Success
- Post-Rehabilitation Transition at Burke Rehabilitation Center
- Diabetes Prevention
- Food Insecurity
- Anger Management
- Domestic Violence Prevention
- Re-Entry Programming

2020 – 2021 Highlights

- ❖ WILC welcomed a new Board member, John Boyle. Mr. Boyle is a person with a disability. His career has been anchored in the education management industry with a special focus on expanding access, opening doors, and impacting outcomes through advocacy, business development, and strategic partnerships. He has made advocacy and expanding access to education his life's work. His knowledge, experience and positive attitude will be a great asset to WILC's Board of Directors.
- ❖ On December 31, 2020, WILC's founding Executive Director, Joe Bravo, retired after being at the helm for 40 years. He was succeeded in the position by the Center's extremely capable and experienced Deputy Executive Director, Margaret Nunziato.
- ❖ The New York Rollin' KNICKS is a National Wheelchair Basketball Association Division team (NWBA), which is co-sponsored by the New York KNICKS and WILC. This year, Steve Serio, who plays for the Rollin' KNICKS, was chosen to play for the USA Men's National Wheelchair Basketball Team at the Paralympic Games in Japan. As Co-Captain, he led the American team to win the Gold Medal – beating the Japanese team. He was also voted the Most Valuable Player at the Games.
- ❖ WILC received an award from the Westchester Employment Network (WEN), Westchester County Office of the County Executive, and the New York State Education Department's Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services – Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) honoring its contributions in furthering employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This year, during the pandemic and the ensuing business cutbacks and closures, WILC staff assisted 35 consumers obtain Full Time jobs and 23 consumers obtain Part Time jobs.
- ❖ WILC's Open Doors Transition Program received additional funding in the amount of \$86,000 per year for 5 years. The purpose of the funding is to hire a Training and Coaching Specialist who will provide education and outreach to nursing homes regarding the newly instituted Good Neighbor Program, identify persons to be "good neighbors" for seniors and persons with disabilities, and provide post-transition coaching to cut down on readmissions to nursing homes.
- ❖ WILC's Open Doors Transition Program, Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) Waiver Program, and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Waiver Program amazingly accomplished an astonishing number of nursing home transitions and diversions while the nursing homes were locked down and Center staff was operating remotely. A total number of **219** Institutional Terminations (Transitions) and **565** Institutional Preventions (Diversions) were carried out this year.

Consumer Stories

The consumer is a 17 year old female with a Hearing Impairment and diagnosed with Anxiety. WILC's Director of Educational Advocacy has been working with the consumer and her mother since August 2012. The consumer wears hearing aids and, when she is in school, she utilizes an FM System. Over the years, the consumer became a strong self-advocate. She has been attending her 504 meetings since middle school and advocating for her needs. During her high school years, the consumer has grown and matured. She started working for a preschool in Westchester and loves working with the students with special needs. She is also a camp counselor at a local camp for students with special needs. She did not let COVID and school closures slow her down. The consumer advocated for the appropriate College Board test accommodations for the SATs and ACTs, including extended time. She did extremely well on both. As part of the college application process, she wrote her college essay on growing up with a disability, the importance of self-advocacy and her love of teaching and working with students with special needs. She applied for early admission to Boston University.

The consumer is a 42 year old African American male with Substance Abuse. The consumer was having a hard time finding employment because of his substance abuse problems. After attending WILC's MOP virtual trainings "Introduction to Finance" and "Social Media Awareness" via ZOOM, he was able to build his credit score and get an auto loan. He now does food service deliveries for Uber Eats and Door-Dash and has an online sales business selling clothing. He is making a living during the pandemic and is grateful for the MOP trainings.

WILC Addresses Housing Crisis In Westchester

The lack of accessible and affordable housing has created a housing crisis for Westchester County residents with disabilities. To address this crisis and increase the number of affordable, accessible housing options for persons with disabilities and seniors, WILC's Executive Director and OHS Housing Specialist outreached to the Housing Action Council toward the common goal of expanding safe, affordable, accessible, and integrated housing. WILC forged new relationships with 2 developers in Westchester - WB Edgemont LLC and NRP Holdings LLC. The WB Edgemont LLC development in Edgemont, NY will now have 7 units set aside for persons with physical disabilities and the NRP Holdings LLC development in Port Chester, NY has agreed to maintain 9 units designed for persons with physical disabilities. WILC will be the Referral Agency for both developments and will provide qualified referrals to the project owners or their designees during the initial marketing period and when vacancies occur.

Virtual Transition & Resource Fair

To improve post-secondary outcomes for transition age youth, PILS Educational Advocacy Program collaborated with the Putnam County Transition Consortium to organize and present a virtual and interactive Resource and Transition Fair via ZOOM. The Fair was held on April 22, 2021. Students, parents and professionals attended the ZOOM event. Vendors included: College Supports and Experience Programs, Career and Employment Supports Programs, Programs for Individuals with I/DD, Financial Supports Programs, Therapeutic Programs, and Advocacy Programs. Interactive breakout sessions included presentations by OPWDD, ACCES-VR, and Post-Secondary Options. To help plan future Resource and Transition Fairs, an online Feedback Form was sent to participants. Responses included the following: "Rooms were easy to enter." "Very informative." "I found that the variety and descriptions of the many programs helped greatly." "It was well done."

Consumer Stories

The consumer is a 43 year old African American female with a Traumatic Brain Injury. She sustained her TBI while vacationing in the Caribbean. Once back in the States, she was placed in a rehabilitation facility for long term care. Prior to her injury, she was a NYC police officer. After the injury, she could no longer work. Her family was desperate to have her leave the rehab facility, but based on their own work and family obligations weren't able to do it on their own. The Social Worker at the facility referred them to WILC's NHTD/TBI RRDC Program for New York City. With the help of WILC's NHTD/TBI New York City staff, the consumer successfully transitioned back into the community. There has been a marked change in her moral, abilities and overall well-being since being home. The TBI Waiver Program allowed her to get the services she needed and gain the independence that would have otherwise been lost. (Transition)

The consumer is a 59 year old male with a Traumatic Brain Injury. The consumer was admitted to a nursing home after having a severe stroke. Due to the length of his rehabilitation, he was not able to continue paying his rent and lost his housing. When he informed his Social Worker that he wanted to transition back to living in the community, he was referred to PILS Open Doors Transition Program. PILS Open Doors Transition Specialist completed his Intake and discussed a transition plan. The consumer was referred to WILC's TBI RRDC Program for the Lower Hudson Valley Region. Once enrolled onto the TBI Waiver, he selected a Service Coordination agency who put together a plan of needed Waiver services to live independently in the community. The Open Doors Transition Specialist also referred him to WILC's Olmstead Housing Subsidy (OHS) Program. The OHS Program found him an apartment and assisted him with securing furniture and needed household items. The consumer reports that he is very happy living in the community.

The consumer is an 18 year old male diagnosed with a Learning Disability – Dyslexia. WILC's Director of Educational Advocacy has been working with the consumer and his family since he was in elementary school. At that time, he was a struggling 3rd grader diagnosed with a learning disability specifically in reading, Dylsexia. The appropriate reading program and supports were advocated for and the consumer began to make progress. For several years, he received his multi-sensory reading program daily and he learned to read. He became more confident in his abilities and he became a self-advocate. He began attending his CSE meetings in middle school and advocated for himself. By the time the consumer entered high school in 2017, he was in all general education classes with the support of a resource room. Throughout his high school career, the consumer helped develop his Individualized Education Program, including his transition plan. He did not let COVID and school closures interfere with his progress. In the Spring, the consumer graduated from high school with honors. At his last annual review/CSE meeting, the consumer thanked all those that supported him throughout the years, stating that he was especially thankful for the early advocating and appropriate supports in reading. He stated that without those supports he may never have learned to read. The consumer will be attending college in South Carolina and will be pursuing a degree in education. He is hoping to help children like himself learn to read, love school and become self-advocates.

The consumer is an 81 year old male with Dementia/Alzheimer's. He had been living in the community with supports from a Managed Long Term Care (MLTC) Plan. As his Dementia progressed, it became increasingly difficult to keep his safety maintained in the community. The MLTC could not provide the sufficient hours of oversight that the consumer needed. The consumer was referred to WILC's NHTD/TBI RRDC Program for the Lower Hudson Valley Region. By enrolling onto the NHTD Waiver Program, the consumer was able to receive the necessary hours for oversight and supervision. He was able remain in the community and avoid being admitted to a nursing home. (Diversion)

Consumer Stories

The consumer is an 84 year old Hispanic female with obesity and memory loss. The consumer was admitted to a nursing facility for rehab following a fall that resulted in a Distal Femur fracture. She was determined to move back to her home, but her family had concerns. They had noticed that she was having increasing memory issues and confusion. Her Social Worker made a referral to PILS Open Doors Transition Program. The consumer chose her granddaughter to act as her advocate. PILS Open Doors Transition Specialist had a phone conversation with the consumer, her granddaughter, and the Social Worker. The consumer agreed to work with Open Doors. The Transition Specialist explained/discussed Managed Long Term Care, the Nursing Home Transition and Diversion Program, aides and aide issues, and the Consumer Directed Personal Aide Program (CDPAP). The granddaughter became a CDPAP aide and is providing some of the aide hours needed by her grandmother. This has been helpful since it can be challenging to get an aide that speaks Spanish. The Transition Specialist also provided information on Food Stamps, Assurance Free phones, and HEAP. The consumer is happy to be home and the family is happy that the Open Doors Transition staff stays in touch for a year, so that if any further questions or issues arise, they will have someone they trust that they can go to for information and assistance.

The consumer is a 43 year old African American male with Mental/Emotional Disability. He was referred to MOP from the Re-Entry Task Force for Anger Management. The consumer had been in state prison for 20 years. His goals were to reconnect with his children and find a job so he could support himself. After successfully completing the Anger Management program, MOP staff connected him with Family Services of Westchester for enrollment in their REAL Parenting program. He found employment in the city doing cleaning and, since attending REAL Parenting, was also able to gain supervised visits with his children.

The consumer is a 21 year old African American male with Substance Abuse. He was referred by the Re-Entry Task Force to MOP's Domestic Violence Program. When he entered the DV Program, he disclosed that he would be a father soon and needed to get his act together. MOP staff assisted him with getting his GED from the State. When he expressed interest in a job in construction, MOP staff connected him with the Westchester Education Opportunity Center where he could get Occupational Safety & Health Administration OSHA 30 training. To work on construction sites, one must have OSHA training and a valid OSHA certificate. Upon completion of his training, MOP staff followed up to help with job placement. He landed a job on a construction site. He is proud he is getting his act together.

The consumer is a 61 year old female with Mental/Emotional Illness. When the pandemic started, she joined the Prevention Connection online support group started by WILC's Mental Health Peer Specialist. When the virtual Holiday Table Project was discussed, she asked questions. She had concerns that she would be too uncomfortable to eat with others online and wasn't sure she could find people who would want to eat a virtual/online holiday meal. WILC's MH Peer Specialist worked with her. He helped her brainstorm with whom she'd feel comfortable. She found people. Her friend set up the ZOOM link. After the meal, they all reached out to say that they had had a great time.

The consumer is a 17 year old male classified with Autism. PILS Director of Educational Advocacy is working with the consumer. The consumer is working towards his Skills Achievement Commencement Credential. The consumer had a very difficult time with remote learning during the school closures due to COVID. He participated in his CSE annual review meeting and verbalized his desire to return to in-person learning. He also discussed his nervousness about COVID. His team acknowledged his feelings and discussed supports that could be put in place for safety and to ease his anxiety. The consumer agreed to start in-person learning 2 days per week. There were a few additional school closures, but slowly he eased into 5 days a week. He said he still gets anxious some days, but speaks with the teachers or psychologist.

Specialized COVID-Related Activities

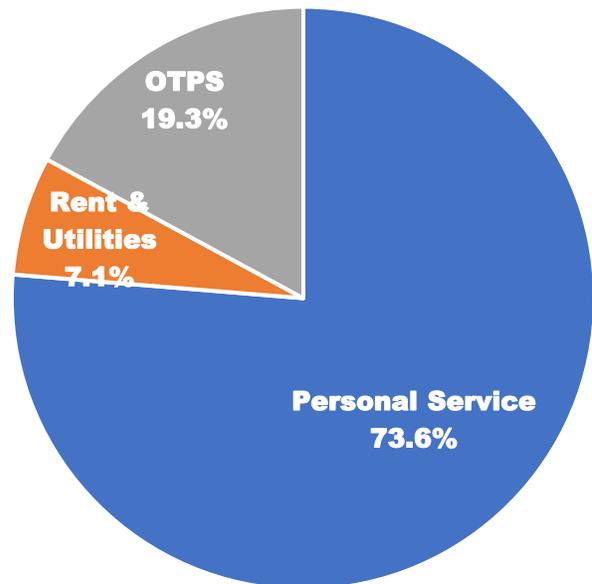
WILC's Mental Health Peer Advocate began an "Online Facilitated Support" group where participants of different generations with varied disabilities could receive and give support to one another as the pandemic continued. The group met, via ZOOM, every Wednesday until the Fall of 2021 when restrictions began to be lifted and people began to leave their homes more.

WILC's Mental Health Peer Advocate found that during the holidays consumers were even more vulnerable due to isolation and loneliness. From that, the concept of a Holiday Table was conceived. The Holiday Table would entail the Mental Health (MH) Peer Advocate supporting "Online Facilitated Support" group members as they invited friends and family to enjoy a meal together, while online. The idea was greeted with enthusiasm. Having someone to share a meal with, even if the meal was to be shared virtually, gave a sense of connection. To accomplish this, group members had to hold their own group for the event. Most in the group weren't used to holding their own groups online so the MH Peer Advocate provided 1:1 training. He also supported them in inviting their family and friends. All who participated thanked the MH Peer Advocate. "I think this was likely the most fun thing I did all holiday season." said one participant. "Thank you for bringing joy and cheer to my holiday season."

Due to pandemic restrictions, students, including students with disabilities, were attending school remotely. To assist parents support their students with remote and hybrid learning, WILC's Parent Training and Information Center (PTIC) Specialist collaborated with the Somers SEPTA, a district-wide Special Education PTA in Westchester County, to develop and present a webinar entitled "Remote & Hybrid Learning During COVID". The webinar, which was presented via ZOOM, included strategies for communication, documenting progress, and methods to support remote learners.

While schools were shut down, learning was not the only school-related function to be held remotely. CSE (Committee on Special Education) meetings were also being held virtually. WILC's Director of Educational Advocacy, in collaboration with the Lower Hudson Regional Special Education Task Force, developed a webinar entitled "Tips and Do's and Don'ts for Participating in Virtual CSE Meetings" to assist parents, professionals and students participate more fully and effectively in virtual CSE meetings. The webinar was presented via ZOOM.

Expenditures During the Year



OTPS is Other Than Personal Service. That 19.3% includes Telephone, Supplies, Equipment, Repairs/Maintenance, Travel, Insurance, Postage, Marketing/Public Relations, and Contracted Services such as Computer Services, Fiscal Management, Payroll Services, Audit, etc.

Grant Income

U.S. Department of Education

Administration for Community Living

Independent Living Funding	\$	228,541
Minority Outreach		194,065
Putnam County Satellite Office		231,583
Independent Living CIL CARES Act		91,616
Minority Outreach CIL CARES Act		91,616
Putnam County Satellite Office CIL CARES Act		91,616

New York State Department of Education

ACCES-VR Independent Living	\$	323,986
ACCES-VR Putnam County Satellite Office		281,884
ACCES-VR Peer Integration Program		157,489

New York State Department of Health

NHTD/TBI RRDC for the Lower Hudson Valley Region	\$	989,152
NHTD/TBI RRDC for the New York City Region		1,609,439

New York State Office for Aging

NY Connects/No Wrong Door	\$	528,629
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Westchester County

Dept of Community Mental Health – MH Advocacy	\$	104,802
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New York Association for Independent Living

Olmstead Housing	\$	106,591
Open Doors Transition		326,869
Diabetes Prevention		44,061

Starbridge

Parent Training and Information	\$	53,000
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Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets

Support and Revenues:

Government Grants	\$	5,604,863
Foundation Grants		68,813
Fees for Service		16,637
Interest Income		1,016
Contributions		2,767
Donated Services		<u>23,520</u>
Total Support and Revenues	\$	5,717,616

Expenses:

Program Services	\$	5,061,651
Administrative Expenses		564,746
Fundraising		<u>8,679</u>
Total Expenses	\$	5,635,076
Increase in Net Assets	\$	82,540
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	\$	511,875
Net Assets at End of Year	\$	594,415

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Main Office:

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