

2019 – 2020

Annual Report

**A Year of Changes,
Challenges and Transitions**

*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

Next year will be WILC's 40th Anniversary. As I write this letter, I am looking back at the year we have just concluded. This Report, entitled "A Year of Changes, Challenges and Transition", focuses on 2019 – 2020 a year unlike any other in the Center's history.

We started the year with the addition of a new program. On November 1, 2019, WILC became the Nursing Home Transition and Diversion/Traumatic Brain Injury Resource and Referral Center (NHTD/TBI RRDC) for the New York City Region, covering all 5 boroughs. The budget for this Program is \$1,596,200 per year. This was the largest one-year budgetary increase that WILC had ever received and the largest influx of new staff all at one time.

January 2020 was an eventful month. WILC began another new program. We received foundation funding to establish a Post-Rehabilitation Transition Program at the Burke Rehabilitation Center. Through Peer Counseling and Case Management, the Program will aid newly disabled persons transition to life with a disability.

Matt Castelluccio resigned from the Board of Directors. He had taken the job of Director of Independent Living Services at BRIDGES – the Rockland Independent Living Center. And, at the end of January, Lisa Tarricone, Director of Systems Advocacy, left her job at WILC to become the Executive Director at Taconic Resources for Independence – the IL Center in Poughkeepsie. She had been with WILC for over 20 years. We wished them both well as they utilized their talents and experience to continue to serve persons with disabilities at other IL Centers.

The Center was adapting to these changes and transitions when, in March, we encountered our greatest challenge to date – COVID. In response to the pandemic and to remain operational, staff adapted to providing individual and group services in an effective manner in a remote format. We embraced the virtual platform as an opportunity to extend and increase access to our services and will continue to do so once we are able to deliver in-person trainings/meetings/services again. WILC received three CIL CARES Act grants. We are utilizing CCA funding to disseminate Gift Cards to consumers to assist them in maintaining their independence during the pandemic.

At the end of the Summer, I officially notified the Board that I would be retiring as Executive Director as of December 31, 2020. I believed that it was time for a change – for myself and the Center. This was not unexpected. I had been working with the Board on this eventuality and a Succession Plan was part of WILC's 3-Year Strategic Plan. Now, I look back at 40 years of growth, development, Center and societal changes, and progress made by persons with disabilities throughout the years. I am proud of the Center's staff, the Board, and believe that the Center is in a great place and there's a great future ahead.

Here's to the next 40 years!

Joe Bravo

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Shelley Klein, PhD –
President

Jennifer Johnson –
Vice President

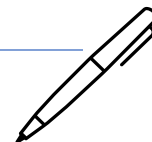
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Westchester Independent Living Center, Inc. (WILC) was incorporated in 1981 as a private, nonprofit (501c3) agency and is funded as a Center for Independent Living by both federal and state governments. WILC serves people with disabilities, their families,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

President's Message



As you read through this report, you will see that this has been an incomparable year of service to our community and of growth for the Center. In fact, we have provided more services to more individuals than in any other year in our history; this despite the fact that our remarkable staff spent half the year working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of this increase was realized through existing grants and funding sources, while some of it was achieved as a result of new grant awards such as the NYS Department of Health award to be the Nursing Home Transition and Diversion/Traumatic Brain Injury Regional Resource and Referral Center for New York City and the Post-Rehabilitation Transition Program in collaboration with the Burke Rehabilitation Hospital funded by the Carvel Foundation and the Field Hall Foundation. We helped people with disabilities to weather the pandemic by providing them with gift cards, paid for by the three Care Act grants that we received, helping them to procure basic necessities and food for their households. We helped keep people in their homes and gave them hope for the future.

As 2020 was coming to an end, we experienced yet one more change with the announcement of the upcoming retirement of our founding Executive Director, Joe Bravo. Leadership matters. And in the years that Joe was at the helm, our Center grew from a fledgling organization with three employees to one of the largest Centers for Independent Living in New York State. The Center will always be indebted to him for his vision and his dedication to our mission of empowering people with disabilities to lead self-directed lives in the community. He will leave behind a sound, strong organization which will continue to build on the strong foundation laid by Joe and provide ever increasing transformative services to the community we serve in the coming years.

Shelley Klein
President, Board of Directors

Consumer Stories

The consumer is a 48 year old African American female with Mental Illness. She had previously been an MOP consumer. She said that when everything started to shut down due to the pandemic, the first place she looked for resources was WILC's website. She noticed the new trainings being offered by the MOP – Introduction to Finance, Banking and Savings Fundamentals, and Social Media Awareness. She was interested in establishing good credit and learning more about social media. She attended all 3 trainings virtually (workshops were presented via ZOOM). After completing the programs, she said she is on LinkedIn connecting with colleagues in similar professions and that she is in the process of establishing her credit, with the goal being to buy a home next summer. She is grateful for the trainings and the hope they gave her for the future.

The consumer is a 65 year old African American female with a Back Injury. She was a referral from ACCES-VR when she needed assistance with benefits. When the pandemic hit, the consumer was barely making ends meet. She was waiting for her SNAP benefits to come through. MOP staff provided her with information on food pantries in her area. When MOP staff made her aware of the Gift Card Program, she gratefully accepted. She stated that she was able to buy needed supplies, such as toilet paper, wipes, cleaning products, etc. that she could not obtain at the Food Pantry.

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	4,334
Family Members/Significant Others	1,109
Other Non-Disabled (Includes Agency/Business Personnel)	810
Business/Agencies	232

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
- Transition Counseling
- Diabetes Prevention
- Anger Management
- Ready Set Work
- Re-Entry Programming

Consumer Stories

The consumer is a 32 year old African American male with Spina Bifida and spastic paraplegia who utilizes a power wheelchair. He had been in a nursing home since 2011. He very much wanted to leave the nursing home and move into the community in Westchester where he has an Uncle. WILC's Open Doors Transition Specialist referred him to WILC's Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) Waiver Program. Once enrolled in the NHTD Waiver Program, he chose a Service Coordinator who assisted in setting up all of his support services. A referral was made to WILC's Olmstead Housing Program. An accessible, affordable apartment was found in Yonkers that also had access to ParaTransit. The consumer signed the lease and transitioned just in time for the holidays. He was able to see his Uncle and enjoy a holiday dinner. When the Transition Specialist checked in on the consumer, he stated that he loved his apartment and his Aides were all great. He now feels he can have a life.

The consumer is a 20 Year old Hispanic female with a Learning Disability and Anxiety. The consumer came to WILC through the Mount Vernon One Stop. Upon meeting with WILC's Minority Outreach Program (MOP) staff, she stated that she had barely made it out of high school and was nervous about going back to school, but needed a job with a future. When asked about her interests, she expressed a passion for cooking. MOP staff referred her to Greyston Workforce Development which has a free Culinary Arts Program. At Greyston, the consumer went through the required soft skills training program with the support of the MOP staff. After that, she went on to the Culinary Arts Program and successfully graduated. Upon graduation, the consumer got a job at the Cheesecake Factory in White Plains, NY as a prep chef.

WILC Now Has 2 NHTD/TBI RRDCs

Background - In 1995, WILC received a grant from NYS Department of Health (DOH) which established WILC as the Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Regional Resource Development Center (RRDC) for the Lower Hudson Valley Region. The Region consists of 7 counties – Westchester, Putnam, Rockland, Orange, Sullivan, Dutchess, and Ulster. In 2007, WILC became the Lower Hudson Valley Region RRDC for DOH's Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) Waiver Program. Since 2009, when DOH combined the TBI and NHTD Waiver RRDCs into one NHTD/TBI RRDC, WILC has been the Lower Hudson Valley NHTD/TBI RRDC.

WILC's Lower Hudson Valley NHTD/TBI RRDC fits in with all WILC's other programs and services that are geared toward consumer self-determination, inclusion in and involvement with communities, and an independent lifestyle. WILC's NHTD/TBI RRDC 1) assists eligible individuals currently living in nursing homes to move to appropriate community-based settings (Transition) and 2) assists individuals at risk of being placed in a skilled nursing facility to remain in an appropriate community-based setting (Diversion). WILC's NHTD/TBI RRDC has a proven track record of focusing on the individual and the kind of life the individual wants. Our NHTD/TBI RRDC staff looks at all resources to create the most flexibility and freedom in order to meet people's needs and support self-determination.

As of November 1, 2019, WILC also became the NHTD/TBI RRDC for the New York City Region. The Program covers all 5 boroughs and is the largest NHTD/TBI RRDC contract in New York State. NYC NHTD/TBI RRDC staff received training to acclimate them to WILC's database and methods of operation. Very quickly they became valued members of WILC's staff. Goals for the new Program were to keep up with the referrals to the Program, work on NYC housing concerns and secure more affordable and accessible housing options, and expand the base of service provider agencies for the NYC Region. At the end of the first year, significant progress was made – increased numbers of participants were enrolled, new agencies became service providers, Transitions and Diversions were accomplished, and all while ensuring participants' and staff's safety and well-being during the pandemic. We look forward to further expansion of the Program – more service providers, more options for service delivery, more enrollments, and more Transitions and Diversions.

Consumer Stories

The consumer is a 69 year old Hispanic male with a Physical Disability and Mental Illness. WILC's IL Advocate met the consumer when she was providing outreach services at the Grace Church Soup Kitchen. The consumer was a patron of the Soup Kitchen. He requested assistance with housing as his landlord had notified him that he had to vacate his apartment because the building was going to be developed for new housing. He had lived in his apartment for over 18 years. He had a limited income and was concerned that he would not be able to find affordable housing and would have to go to a shelter. WILC's IL Advocate contacted the Section 8 Housing and Voucher Program on his behalf. His case was given priority and, in less than a month, he was given a lease and moved into his new apartment. The consumer did not have any furniture. WILC's IL Advocate reached out to the Furniture Share House and, for a nominal fee, he was able to get everything he needed. The consumer now feels secure knowing he has a safe place to live.

The consumer is a 17 year old female diagnosed as Bipolar with a history of self-harm and running away. The problem had been getting her to attend school both physically and intellectually. In the Fall of 2019 and Winter 2020, PILS Educational Advocate worked closely with the consumer, her mother, and the school district to ensure that the appropriate program modifications and IEP goals were in place. The consumer advocated for her needs and a coordinated set of transition activities were developed. Through careful monitoring, small but clear goals, complete team involvement and frequent checkpoints, the consumer graduated from High School this Spring 2020.

Post-Rehab Transition Program

This year, WILC collaborated with the Burke Rehabilitation Center to develop a Post-Rehabilitation Transition Program to assist newly disabled persons transition to life with a disability. We applied to numerous foundations for funding and received \$15,000 from the Carvel Foundation and \$50,000 from the Field Hall Foundation. The Program provides Case Management and Peer Counseling services utilizing a person-centered approach. It is run by WILC's Peer Integration Program (PIP) staff. This year, the Program provided services to 102 Burke patients and their families. Services included ongoing case management; benefits advisement; IL Skills; assistance with issues such as food insecurities, social isolation, transportation, PPEs, and other pandemic related services; caregiver support; and peer support. Peers for this Program were recruited and trained by PIP staff. When pandemic restrictions went into place, the Case Management and Peer Counseling services were provided remotely via phone, email and/or virtually via ZOOM. When surveyed, a majority of participants shared that their experience with the Program was very favorable and that they found it to be helpful while transitioning back to the community. Burke social workers found our referrals, peers, and caregiver support group to be very helpful. This Program was so successful in its 1st year that WILC was contacted about expanding the Program to other rehabilitation facilities.

WILC Responds to Pandemic

When closures went into effect in March, the Center remained operational, albeit in a different manner. The Center adapted to providing services in an effective manner remotely and/or virtually. WILC was well-positioned to provide a variety of services virtually. We embraced the virtual platform not only to maintain access to our services, but as an opportunity to extend and increase access to our services, as well. Staff provided individual services, organized and attended virtual meetings, developed and presented online workshops and recreational/social activities, and developed virtual support groups and trainings to assist consumers and professionals cope with the realities of life during a pandemic. The Center also offers 1:1 services via ZOOM when a phone call is not appropriate and the need for person-to-person contact is paramount and the Educational Advocacy staff participates in school meetings virtually. The virtual platform enabled WILC to continue to provide services under extremely trying and difficult circumstances.

Consumer Stories

The consumer is a 38 year old Native American male with Mental Illness. The consumer completed WILC's Ready Set Work (RSW) workshop. Upon completion of RSW, MOP staff assisted him with short term goals and worked with him on his interviewing skills. The consumer got an interview at St. John's Riverside Hospital in Yonkers, NY for a janitorial position and obtained the job.

The consumer is a 76 year old female with Cerebral Palsy. The consumer has had many issues related to her Cerebral Palsy her entire life, as well as alcoholism, and more recently, memory issues. She was living in a very unsafe situation with minimal support and services. With her referral to WILC's NHTD Waiver Program, the consumer was able to begin working with a Service Coordinator who set her up with substance abuse services, connected her with new doctors and implemented support services in her home to keep her safe, including Aide services and transportation. Because of WILC's NHTD Waiver Program, the consumer was able to avoid being placed in a nursing home (Diversion/Institutional Prevention).

The consumer is a 53 year old female with a Developmental Disability and PTSD. Due to the pandemic, she was furloughed in March from her part-time job. This put a major financial strain on the consumer, who prides herself on the level of independence that she has achieved. She used the CCA Gift Card to buy food and pay for bus fare to get to the store and to the pharmacy. She contacted the Center to say how grateful she was for the assistance.

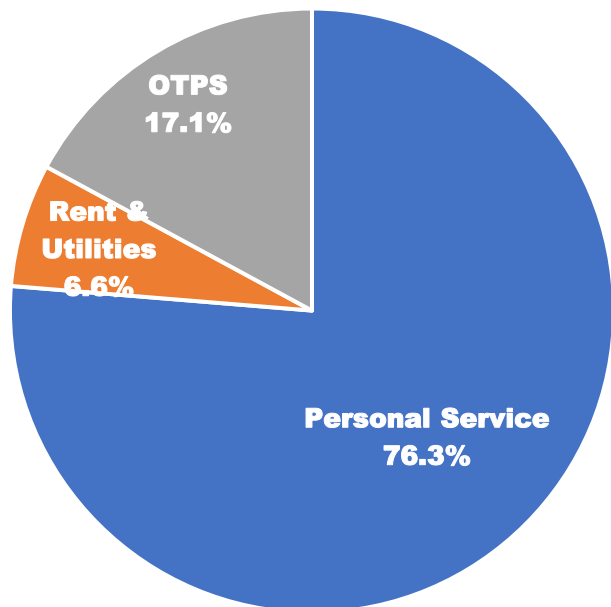
Community Activities

WILC staff serve on community boards, committees and task forces, such as:

Westchester Long Term Care Council, Westchester Employment Network (WEN), Rockland Employment Network (REN), Westchester County Advisory Council on People with Disabilities, Westchester County Advisory Committee on Emergency Planning, Westchester County Advisory Committee on Emergency Planning's Subcommittee on Community Preparedness and Public Outreach, Coalition on Hispanic Aging, PACE Women's Justice Center Legal Assistance for Victims Committee, Livable Communities Collaboratives for Aging Services in Westchester, White Plains Mayor's Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities, White Plains Public Safety Community Affairs Council, Hudson Valley Housing Alliance, Peer Workforce Committee for the Southern Tier of New York, and Urban League of Westchester.

Staff also serves on: National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Putnam Mental Health Single Point of Access Committee (SPOA), Mental Health Association in Putnam County Board of Directors, Putnam County Transition Consortium, Putnam County's Coordinated Children's Services Initiative (CCSI), and the Lower Hudson Regional Special Education Task Force.

Expenditures During the Year



OTPS is Other Than Personal Service. That 17.1% 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		25,000
Minority Outreach CIL CARES Act		25,000
Putnam County Satellite Office CIL CARES Act		25,000

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		222,569
Statewide Systems Advocacy Network		32,000

New York State Department of Health

NHTD/TBI RRDC for the Lower Hudson Valley Region	\$	945,624
NHTD/TBI RRDC for the New York City Region		1,336,972

New York State Office for Aging

NY Connects/No Wrong Door	\$	527,270
Ombudsman Program		93,680

Westchester County

Dept of Community Mental Health – MH Advocacy	\$	105,764
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New York Association for Independent Living

Olmstead Housing	\$	103,098
Open Doors Transition		302,481
Diabetes Prevention		50,000

Starbridge

Parent Training and Information	\$	50,000
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Carvel and Field Hall Foundations

Post-Rehabilitation Transition	\$	34,187
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City of White Plains

Community Development Block Grant	\$	4,601
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Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets

Support and Revenues:

Government Grants	\$	5,261,287
Foundation Grants		84,187
Fees for Service		62,974
Interest Income		747
Contributions		1,235
Donated Services		51,199
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Total Support and Revenues \$ **5,461,629**

Expenses:

Program Services	\$	4,934,039
Administrative Expenses		495,028
Fundraising		7,651
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Total Expenses	\$	5,436,718

Increase in Net Assets \$ **24,911**

Net Assets at Beginning of Year \$ **486,964**

Net Assets at End of Year \$ **511,875**

WILC first opened its doors in 1981 - The Center had 3 employees – The office consisted of 2 spaces at Knollwood Road, White Plains, NY

Now the Center has 67 employees – The Main Office is at 10 County Center Road, White Plains, NY (10,000 sq. ft.) – WILC's Satellite Office, Putnam Independent Living Services (PILS), is at 1441 Rt. 22, Brewster, NY (6,000 sq. ft.)

Putnam Independent Living Services (PILS) was opened in 2002 when we received a federal grant to establish a satellite office in Putnam County.

In 1995, WILC was one of the original 3 Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Regional Resource Development Centers (RRDCs) in NYS.

In 2007, WILC became the Nursing Home Transition and Diversion (NHTD) Waiver RRDC for the Lower Hudson Valley Region.

WILC's NHTD Waiver RRDC had the 1st participant on the Waiver statewide and the 1st housing participant statewide.

WILC co-sponsors with the NY KNICKS a competitive wheelchair basketball team. The team – the Rollin' KNICKS - is a member of the National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA). In 2014, the Rollin' KNICKS – coached by WILC's past Board President, Gerard Fleming and WILC's Executive Director, Joe Bravo - won their first NWBA championship. Since then, the team has been the NWBA Champions 2 more times.

A WILC Board Member, Jennifer Johnson, is a Paralympian. Ms. Johnson was a member of multiple U.S. Paralympian teams representing the U.S. around the world.

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

Justin Dart
Disability Rights Movement Icon
Father of the ADA

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Main Office:

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White Plains, New York 10607

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914-259-8036 (VP)

914-682-8518 (Fax)

www.wilc.org

www.facebook.com/WILCNews

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845-228-7457 (Voice)

914-259-8036 (VP)

845-228-7460 (Fax)

www.PutnamILS.org

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Outreach Office:

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Yonkers, New York 10701