

SILO Newsletter: December 2025

A Message from the CEO

One of my many goals to keep improving SILO as an Independent Living Center (ILC) is to increase our effort to efficiently and effectively communicate with the Suffolk/Nassau disability community.

Even though, our website provides a good deal of information, I still think there's tremendous amount of room for improvement. We recently looked meticulously at our website and all the other current social platforms and plan to make some adjustments to increase our ability to communicate with you.

We have hired Kaitlyn Fedziuk to help with this effort; to coordinate our communication throughout the community. She has designed an extensive plan, to make it possible for SILO to present itself in a stronger light.

Some of the many changes we will be making is an increase in the number of posts we make during the month. These posts will discuss political issues that are of interest to people with disabilities, SILO advocacy initiatives, workshops for our participants. (online or in person), or other pertinent information. We will spotlight employees and run a series called 'Meet our Directors'. We will present client testimonials and bring you more information on the various services we have available for people with disability and their families.

Another one of our efforts will be increasing the number of platforms we will use to communicate with the community. We will be developing a TikTok account in the near future.

We will continue to make sure all our platforms are accessible and thereby available to the various disability communities.

We welcome your constructive feedback. And let us know what more you would like to know about us.

I wish you all very happy and safe holidays season.

Joseph Delgado

Chief Executive Officer

LGBT Network Workplace Summit

In October, Kelly-Rae Douglas, Director of NY Connects, and Alberta Galdi, Public Education/Outreach, proudly represented SILO at the LGBT Network Workplace Summit. This important event brought together professionals, advocates, and members of the community dedicated to advancing LGBT inclusion efforts to create safer workplaces for LGBT employees.

Demystifying Disability

By Judith Wieber

In mid-September, many of SILO's staff attended the New York Association of Independent Living (NYAIL) conference held in Albany this year. I learned that one of their keynote speakers was Emily Ladau, the author of the book: "Demystifying Disability, What to Know, What to Say, And How to be an Ally", written in 2021. Though I did not get to attend the conference, I did read her book. It not only is available on Amazon, and other places you can buy books, it is also available through the National Braille and Talking Book Library Service, DB 105481. (Originally produced by Penguin Random House Audio for commercial use, the unabridged version has been adapted for the National Braille and Talking Book Library Service. Both commercial and NLS versions of the book are read by the author.)

Not only did the conference serve as a great way to get to know the author, but it allowed readers of her book an opportunity to get their copy of the book signed. Attendees learned that Ladau is a native Long Islander, and that she is no stranger to being in the public eye, appearing on Sesame Street, and now writing for ABLE News, published here on Long Island.

I was drawn to the book, for two reasons: First, in the introduction of the book, she mentions "if the disability community wants a world that is accessible to us, then we must make ideas and experiences of disability accessible to the world." I think this is a very healthy approach to change. It suggests that we have the responsibility to make our world a happier place to live, not only for ourselves, but for generations to come after us. Also, it is done in a very neutral way. A way that is not biting people's heads off. It does not blame anyone for things not being made accessible, but rather – and this has been my experience - wouldn't it be better if... It is a good way for people to take a peek into a culture without thinking that, every time they encounter a person with a disability, they need to stop and ask the disabled person publicly some very personal questions, or maybe people will not stop and stare out of curiosity, or a yearning to learn, but will realize how rude it is, and how that can make a person feel uncomfortable, or self-conscious. The one thing we do all have in common is that we are human beings trying to get along. **Emily emphasizes to live by the Golden Rule: Treat others as you would like to be treated, with respect. Be curious, ask questions, but be respectful first and foremost.**

The second thing that drew me to this book is that I, too, lived with someone who had the same disability as myself. Emily's mother has the same disability as she has. Though she claims in the book that she is not an expert on everything pertaining to disability, I would agree that it certainly gives you a lot of insight into the community of disabled folk.

She makes a good case for such a book with questions like: “Have you ever felt flustered trying to find the right words when trying to talk about disability? Have you ever shushed your kid for asking questions about a person in a wheelchair?” She goes on to not only challenge nondisabled persons to see things through the perspective of a person with a disability, but challenges people with disabilities to get to know the perspective of others that may have a different disability than themselves.

She is very open and honest. She admits how she, too, has been guilty of ‘ablism’, and how we really need to be aware of how we all can find ourselves falling into such behavior. It encourages the reader to be reflective of their actions, and to learn from one’s mistakes, keeping in mind that no one is perfect, that we all can push ourselves to improve.

Another important aspect is that she spends a good amount of time talking about the history of disability. What she describes is not the full history, but rather, events that occurred during the twentieth century in America that struck a chord with her. I would agree it is by knowing our history that we appreciate our present struggles, and the struggles of the past. It lets us know how far we have come, the accomplishments we have made, and what we still need to work on. It can help us set a course for the future. She brings attention to how, in a few states in our country, there is legislation making the history of disability part of school civil rights curriculum. Why is it not in every state?

In conclusion, I would recommend the book for all to read. Anyone reading will find it to be good information, especially those working in the field of disability. It is a good idea because, at some time in our lives, we will encounter someone with a disability, have a relative that has or acquires a disability, or we ourselves may acquire a disability. It gives a gentle, and even light, way to look at a sensitive topic. In many incidences through the book, Emily either finds herself overthinking not wanting others to get so bogged down about how to interact with people with disabilities that they avoid interacting for fear of being insensitive or discriminatory. I believe her intent is to help things feel more natural and comfortable with each other. I am reminded of the movie “Jerry Maguire”, when Tom Cruz’s character, Jerry, looks for mutual cooperation from Cuba Gooding Jr.’s character, Rod Tidwell, when faced with the task of finding Tidwell a football position deserving of Rod’s talents. “Help me help you,” I really believe that is the goal of everyone involved. We are not all born with all the knowledge we will need to survive in this world. Emily even states, giving credit to the famous Beatle song: “We all get by with a little help from our friends.”

Giving personal narratives, written or spoken, can only help. Realizing being disabled is not anyone’s fault, and asking for something to be made accessible is okay. Emily’s words let others know, especially newly disabled people, that it is okay, they are okay, we are not

alone in our struggles, that somewhere, someone out there thought and felt the same way about themselves and the environment they live in. It is an opportunity for all of us to talk it all out, to ask questions respectfully, and stand together, disabled and nondisabled, arm in arm, to speak up, to speak out for the things we need to be happier and find quality of life.

SILO's 2025 Thanksgiving Meal Drive

Thanksgiving at SILO is all about community, connection, and showing up for those who rely on us. This November, our staff worked together to distribute **140 Thanksgiving meals** throughout the community. Each meal package included a turkey or chicken, accompanied by a variety of traditional holiday side dishes. This was a collaborative effort led by our NY Connects and Housing departments. Our staff went above and beyond to ensure that individuals and families had a warm holiday meal to enjoy. We are grateful for our dedicated staff, partners, and the trust our community places in us.

The Gift of Being Present

By Stephanie Dellasperanzo

When was the last time you were fully in the present moment? Hopefully, you can recall a recent time where you were able to immerse yourself in your surroundings, unpreoccupied by what was coming next or what had already happened. What if you could help create more opportunities to truly be in the here and now, while allowing yourself to slow down and experience life a little more wholly? Practicing mindfulness helps give you the tools to do so, which can have a positive impact on your daily life and your overall health and happiness. Mindfulness can also help with stress reduction, improved sleep, emotional regulation, and even feeling more connected to those around us. A great way to become more present is to start by using your breathing as an anchor point. Inhaling and exhaling offers a reliable place that we can come back to anytime for grounding, and a little practice can have numerous benefits.

If you're interested in trying a mindfulness technique for yourself, you can try this simple breathing exercise called box breathing. Start by inhaling slowly through your nose for four seconds, hold for another four seconds, exhale slowly through your mouth for four seconds, and hold for four seconds. You can repeat this exercise up to four times if it's comfortable for you, which can help calm your nervous system. Feeling calm can help improve your mood and focus, and help you feel more connected to your surroundings. There are many similar techniques to box breathing where you can shorten or lengthen your inhales and exhales, so don't hesitate to discover what works best for you. Closing your eyes while doing exercises like this can be beneficial as it better allows you to simply be present and breathe. If you've tried this while reading along, do your notice yourself feeling

any calmer? If you find breathing exercises to be helpful, you may be interested in building upon this technique and trying meditation.

Meditation is truly a practice where the goal is not having a mind free of thoughts. Rather, meditation teaches you to allow space for your thoughts and feelings and observe them as if they were leaves floating down a river. Learning to meditate can be difficult at first, because of our minds' tendency to wander when there are fewer distractions. However, it becomes easier the more you practice, even if you start out meditating for just a moment or two. Learning to observe our thoughts and feelings before reacting brings more clarity into daily life and helps with deciding what to engage with and what to let pass by. This can aid in improving the relationship you have with yourself and those around you, as it teaches us to pause before making decisions. There are many paths to learning meditation, and a simple online search can be a good way to get started. Beginning with guided meditations can make learning easier, since they offer a gentle structure to learn.

There are countless other ways to incorporate mindfulness into your daily life, as each moment presents its own unique opportunity to connect with yourself and be in the now. Having a mindful snack or meal can be a great way to do something enjoyable while also grounding yourself. Eating offers us a chance to engage with many of our senses, which is why it can become part of a mindfulness practice. Focusing on the different scents, textures, and flavors can all be used to anchor you in the present. Similarly, spending time outside gives us many ways to engage our senses to help guide us back to the moment. Nature provides us with so many ways to ground ourselves. Something as simple as noticing a gentle breeze or the warmth of the sun can help bring your mind and body back to the present. Taking a deep breath or finding something in your environment to anchor you just may help you feel calmer and more present. Even small pauses can help create more space in your mind to help you feel more connected and live more fully in the moment. With practice, this can help build a foundation for you to bring calm and clarity into your daily life.

Employee Spotlight

Maria Vanegas, *Open Doors Assistant Director*

We are happy to honor Maria Vanegas for going above and beyond! Maria is the Assistant Director of Open Doors. She is great at problem solving and there is no such thing as a silly question in her mind. Her door is always open for anyone needing help. She is a team player and builds unity in her department. Thanks for all you do Maria!

Judy Wieber, *Front Desk Receptionist*

We are happy to honor Judy Wieber for all her amazing work! Judy is our front desk receptionist here at SILO. She is always ready to greet us with a smile in the morning. We appreciate how helpful and great of a problem solver she is. Thanks for all you do Judy!

Where Work and Fun Collide: Finding Priorities in the Duality

By Angel Vasquez

Every day when we rise from slumber, two words emerge before us: work and fun. For many people, it can be difficult to find the right balance between the two. At times, one can become more dominant than the other. I myself have had to contend with this. Being an autistic individual, balancing work and fun has not always been clear. Throughout my life, my mind has been pulled in various directions. It was quite challenging for me, especially when my very routine was usually thrown off balance. I would find myself unable to break through the psychological barriers that presented themselves before me, which is why it is crucial for one to set key priorities to focus on. Priorities, if assembled carefully, will clear out the confusion that most usually face.

The duality of work and fun has constantly wrapped itself around my mind for as long as I can remember. Too often I was pressured to go about things a certain way, and simply told to “buckle down and get it done,” and “you better get your act together.” This advice, along with others like it, has never served me well. Mainly because those who were giving me this advice had no idea how to talk to autistic individuals, so I simply had no clue what to do with such advice. When I failed to meet their standards, they would make me feel like I was broken and damaged beyond repair. I truly felt like a complete failure and believed that I would never be capable of having meaningful fun. Any form of fun that I did have made me feel inadequate. I felt lazy when I had the opportunity to enjoy my leisure time.

From middle school and all the way to college, this lingering guilt plagued my mind and body. There was no meaningful guidance to turn toward. Most of my classmates were of little to no help as well. They would mock me just for being who I am. In one instance, during the middle of class, one classmate joked about my tendency to start my answer with “it was quite intriguing” after raising my hand to tell our professor my first thoughts about the article assigned to us that day. In response to this, I stared at him until he stopped making fun of the way I spoke.

Every time I look back at both my school and college years, I noticed that the teachers, professors, administrators, and the Board of Education were worse than the students. They would always try to discourage or intimidate me. I found their expectations to be extremely linear and tone deaf. There was more emphasis on “working hard” than actually meeting autistic people where they are. Learning should be the main priority when it comes to the

attendance of neurodivergent individuals. Forcing them to act “normal” and do an overwhelming amount of class assignments is counterproductive to learning.

Years later, I realized that my brain simply operates differently than that of a neurotypical person. It was not until I started working with my academic coach in January 2021 that I really began to generate priorities. Since he specializes in working with people who have Autism and ADHD, he’s been able to work with me at my own pace and understands that I think differently.

For instance, he and I discuss which days, weeks, and times would best suit our course of action. My academic coach would also guide me through my writing process by brainstorming literary ideas with me. He and I would discuss how many pages I should have completed for essays on certain days. We even worked out alternative plans in case things came up. When I found myself struggling a lot, I would either notify him about my situation or he would ask me. He offered suggestions and solutions that I could consider in order to resolve whatever matter it was.

In addition, he would always remind me to have fun every once in a while. Unlike those before him, he never pressured me to operate a certain way, nor did he try to convince me that I am a complete failure. My academic coach simply wanted to help me succeed. He knew that my personal well-being came first before my academics. Otherwise, I would not be able to function properly. Priorities are vital to our overall success in both our public and personal lives. Work and fun serve as important dual elements of the human experience. It can be challenging at times, especially when there are outside forces that try to blur the line between work and fun.

With the right tools and advice, those with Autism can successfully find a balance and live their lives to the fullest, despite the prejudices of the outside world. Even if they can't afford to hire an executive function coach, seeking the advice of those who care about them rather than belittling them is the next best thing. While it's a part of autism, over-rigid thinking does more harm than good. To overcome this, people with autism need to create mental space to reflect. In my executive coaching sessions, I had to reflect on my processes and how to improve them. I had to investigate long and hard how to more efficiently complete my weekly tasks. By doing this, I was able to have a better understanding of what my coach was trying to tell me.

If done successfully, proper reflection and the implementation of a more efficient schedule can really help neuro-divergent individuals overcome the odds and establish more productive routines for themselves. You never know when you're going to find yourself in difficult times. In order to adapt, one must reflect.

Job Openings at SILO

Visit our website for more information.

www.siloinc.org/siloemployment

1. Independent Living Specialist – *Housing Department*

Please email your resume to humanresources@siloinc.org or apply on Indeed.

Upcoming Holiday Closures

December 23rd: Closing at 11:30 AM

December 24th - January 2nd: Holiday Break

For more information and future closings, please check the calendar on our events page.

www.siloinc.org/events

Do you want to be featured in our newsletter?

Send your story to Kaitlyn at communications@siloinc.org.

Social Media

Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/Selfinitiatedlivingoptions/>

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