SILO Newsletter: *November 2026*

A Message from the CEO

As we approach the holiday season, we recognize that this time of year can be stressful for many. And, given the changing political climate and the outcomes of this year's elections, there may be additional uncertainty about what lies ahead.

More than ever, the disability community must come together. We must continue to partner, collaborate, and remain determined to ensure that our civil rights are protected and advanced. We cannot afford to become complacent. We must continue pushing our agenda forward and making our voices heard. At the forefront of that agenda must be ACCESSIBILITY.

Accessibility is information. It is technology. It is transportation and communication. It is employment and education. It is housing. It is access to government services and, ultimately, the ability to fully participate in our communities.

As we become increasingly dependent on a digital world, we must remain vigilant in ensuring that applications, websites, digital platforms, and all other forms of communication are accessible to people with disabilities. Technology should open doors, not create additional barriers.

We must remain steadfast in holding our government accountable while continuing to work in partnership with our elected officials and policymakers. We must ensure that government continues to work for us and, just as importantly, works WITH us to create a more inclusive and accessible society. Our vision must remain clear: A society where a person's disability does not determine the size of their dreams, limit their opportunities, or define their future.

On behalf of myself, the Board of Directors, and the entire staff of SILO, I wish you and your families and friends a wonderful holiday season and a healthy, happy, and prosperous New Year.

Joseph M. Delgado
Chief Executive Officer

Taking Notes from Trees

By Stephanie Konarski

As the trees shake loose their colorful leaves, let’s reflect on what we can learn from them. At first, it may seem as though we live very different lives from our towering friends, but they can teach us a lot. Their roots keep them grounded, their leaves bring them energy, and

they know when to let go of what is no longer needed. They do all of this while growing and adapting to their environments and weathering the seasons. We can ask ourselves, what do we find grounding? What energizes us? And how do we let go when we recognize that doing so is necessary? Everyone's answers will be different, just like no two trees are the same, but exploring our unique answers allows us to better care for ourselves.

There are many ways to come back to the present moment when you have been swept away by life, thoughts, or worries. Just like trees use their roots to keep upright and weather storms, we can support ourselves through the practice of grounding. One of the simplest ways to reconnect with the moment is becoming aware of the rise and fall of our breath. Taking slow, intentional breaths or practicing a technique like box breathing provides us with an ever-present way to center ourselves. You can also try the calm place exercise, which is a visualization technique that helps you create a peaceful mental space. Start by taking some deep breaths and closing your eyes. Try to picture a place, either real or imaginary, where you find comfort, peace, or quiet. Take your time exploring which senses you can bring attention to and allow your feelings to come and go as you rest. When you create a calm place in your mind, and find ways to reconnect with yourself, you will always have somewhere safe to return to.

Leaning into what energizes you is another lesson we can learn. Trees turn towards the sunlight that nourishes them, and we can also bring our attention to what makes us energized. What do you find fulfilling? Take a moment to reflect on what makes you feel alive. Maybe it's spending time with loved ones, enjoying your favorite meal, or something as simple as noticing a gentle breeze as it passes by. How often are you able to incorporate these moments into your daily life? Making space each day to experience something that brings you happiness can have positive effects on your overall well-being. When things are busy, it is vital to set aside time to re-energize yourself to prevent burnout and illness. Setting aside even just a few minutes for yourself each day can reduce stress, improve focus, and make your life more balanced.

Another way we can support ourselves is by knowing when to let go, as the trees do when they drop their leaves each fall. When we are weighed down by things that are unhealthy for us, it can have negative impacts on our lives. It can be helpful to notice what fills your cup, and what empties it. Is there anything or anyone that consistently leaves you exhausted? What would your life look like if you were to let go of the situation or relationship? Some things are only meant to last for a season or two, and it's okay to create distance to protect your peace. There are times when we feel stuck in trying circumstances, and it is not always possible to fully remove ourselves from all challenges, but that doesn't mean we are powerless. We can remind ourselves of the other lessons we have learned from the

trees. Finding our roots within helps us weather difficulties, and making space for moments of joy can give us something to look forward to, no matter what we're going through.

SILO's 8th Self-Advocacy Conference

On Tuesday, October 6th, SILO hosted our 8th Self-Advocacy Conference. The conference opened with keynote speaker Jim Hughes, speaking on his personal experience of becoming a high school teacher, despite having visual impairments. Later, we heard from Paul and Hava, a couple with disabilities who fought for their rights to live together after marriage. We ended the day with a fantastic performance by comedian, Tugboat Manny, who highlighted that you can still laugh while dealing with mental health struggles. Throughout the day, attendees had the option to participate in several workshops that covered fair housing laws, voting rights, ADA basics, employment tips, and traveling with disabilities. We would like to thank Kelsey Kalafut, Marilyn Tucci, Ian Wilder, Michael Ring, and Tino Ioannidis for taking the time to share their expertise with us! SILO is looking forward to our next Self-Advocacy Conference, and we hope to see you there! Please visit our website for more information and photos!
www.siloinc.org/selfadvocacyphotos

Just in Case You Missed It:

By Judith Wieber

SILO held its 8th annual Self Advocacy Conference on October 6th at the Holiday Inn in Holtsville. We heard from excellent speakers: Jim Hughs, a retired American History high school teacher who is blind; Paul and Hava Forziano, a married couple with developmental disabilities; and comedian Tugboat Manny. A total of five workshops were presented: accessible voting, self-advocacy for employment, understanding the ADA, an explanation of fair housing laws as they pertain to people with disabilities, and how to travel with a disability.

Jim Hughs inspired us by sharing his insights into what made him a successful person despite his physical blindness and hearing loss. He used the acronym GAMER to remember his five points to keep in mind when becoming a confident self-advocate:

G for Gratitude
A for Acceptance
M for Motivation
E for Enjoyment
R for Reflection

He began by telling us how disability was not uncommon in his family, having a mom and siblings with visual impairments.
He talked about the gratitude he felt for having had his deceased brother in his life. How he accepted his disabilities because they did bring him opportunities he would not have had otherwise. Jim spoke of how it is ok to accept help from time to time. The importance of having a goal, a passion and not giving up on that goal. Stay motivated; when others say no, say yes. Remembering to enjoy life adds fun to the schedule; it is so important to recharge and have fun. Reflect on our successes and accomplishments. Do not forget the work you have done. Celebrating small successes makes life worth living.
Paul and Hava taught us that love can truly be all we need, and no one can, or should, take that away from us. Conference goers got to experience their journey of love and marriage through a prepared documentary, followed by questions and discussion.
The day closed with the laughs brought about by Navy Reservist and Merchant Mariner, veteran Tugboat Manny, who put smiles on our faces while touching on serious subjects and the power of resilience.
If you missed our conference this year, no worries. SILO will soon be planning their 9th annual conference, to be held sometime in 2028. Please stay focused on our website for information. If you have any thoughts on what you would like to learn about, or thoughts on how we can improve our conference, do not hesitate to reach out to communications@siloinc.org.

Meet Lavinia, One of SILO'S New Board Members

By Judith Wieber

This October, I got the opportunity to interview Lavinia Arcuri, a fabulous person in all aspects. Lavinia was born in the Bronx. Her dad worked for Federal Express, and her parents decided Long Island would be a nice place for the kids to grow up. At the age of three, her family moved to Ronkonkoma. The one thing Lavinia knew even as a young child was that she always wanted to help people. And so, while in high school, she went to BOCES to receive a certificate in childcare. From her early work taking care of children, she pursued a certificate as a certified home health care worker.
There, she really came to know that nursing was her passion. She decided to attend Western Suffolk BOCES to obtain her License in Practical Nursing in Northport, NY. She did this while working at John Jay Skilled Nursing Facility. She felt very blessed by this opportunity. Working at John Jay while going to school allowed her to get hands-on practice from her peers. Plus, the BOCES program was something she could attend in the evening.
"The Northport program was a demanding program, but I chose it. I was confident I would be ready to provide excellent health care to my patients. It provided 1,161 hours of

practicum over a 16-month course. It was rigid and tough. About 50 students started with me only nine made it." Lavinia was one of them.

Her positive attitude and wish to uplift others certainly explain her nickname: "Fabulous". "I treated my patients as I would have been talking to my own family members. My work was more than just a job where you start at 9am and finish at 5pm. I would go in early to make sure supplies were available, I would stay late, making sure everything was taken care of before heading home. Whatever it took to make patients and families feel comfortable. I would always bring my peeps snacks, allow them the space to sit and talk to me. I even would give my personal phone number to families and patients, so if they had a concern, they could call me."

I could tell by talking to Lavinia it was a vocation or calling to be a nurse. Her personality is such that she takes joy in seeing others happy. She uses the words 'fabulous' and 'wonderful' when describing herself, or her day's experience. When she came to Marilyn's support group, Marilyn had a sign made which read: "Welcome Fabulous!" Lavinia told me how she hung it on the door at home and often looks at it with a smile.

So brought the question: "How did you learn of SILO?" Lavinia answered: "It was September 28, 2018, I was driving home, it was late, and my car hydroplaned. I did not remember anything. I was paralyzed from the chest down and was in a coma for three months. Once conscious and ready to leave the hospital, I went to Arcadia nursing home, for rehabilitation.

"Ironically, I worked there, and after being a nurse for over 25 years, I now need nursing. Not only did I need nursing, but I was now being nursed by women I once had supervised and directed. That was a very humble experience. It was there that my social worker told me about SILO. I learned that I could come to the support group after a while. I also learned about the Traumatic Brain Injury Waiver, which is a New York State Medicaid Waiver program, overseen by SILO. The program helped me to transition from nursing home into an apartment of my own. Being disabled does not define me. I am learning increasingly each day that we all deserve the right to have equal opportunities. I have learned that disabilities can be invisible as well. I tell everybody, please be kind because you do not know what someone is struggling with. Everyone should just try to be kind to each other."

Lavinia told me of a story of how when her aid comes to take care of some chores around her apartment, she will go out and get her nails done. One afternoon on her way to the salon she had to cross the railroad tracks. While crossing the tracks her powered wheelchair stopped. Fear and anxiety ran through her mind. She then came to realize that it was her bag on the wire that must have prevented the power from reaching her motor. Thank God she was able to pull the bag off, and resume. The chair started up, and she continued to her destination. To be stopped literally frozen on the tracks had to be a very scary experience. However, Lavinia was able to have presence of mind to figure out what

was going on, and before even signaling that she was in distress, was able to get herself off the train track before a train approached.

Part of the problem here was that she was dealing with a mechanical issue prior to this event. She had ordered a new joystick, which takes at least two months to receive.

A person's power chair is their life. It is the way they get around. Most are customized and require adjustment and specific parts. If you have a powered chair that is not fully functioning, a person will be stuck in bed, or a manual chair, not going anywhere until their chair is fixed. This does not help a person's mental health or physical health. A person may even find themselves taking undue risk just to get out for some fresh air. Simple tasks can do wonders for one's self esteem and mental health. Being able to leave a bed, or chair, cuts down on health complications, especially when your body is unable to move itself. It gives you more independence, making you less dependent on others for assistance.

Lavinia was able to streamline the process for herself, by contacting Medicaid, her doctor, and the provider to obtain the necessary part. But she questions why she had to do this, and what if she did not follow the process, or learn the process ahead of time?

This story reminded me of two bills in the New York State Legislature – Bill NY S04500, the "Consumer Wheelchair Repair Bill of Rights Act", which was introduced by Senator Patricia Fahy and supported by Senator Jake Ashby, which passed in June 2026. The complimentary bill is A6569B supported by Assemblyperson Bores, "Consumer Right to Repair", which is still sitting in the Assembly Consumer Affairs Protection Committee.

Once the law comes to fruition, it promises quicker return time for parts and repairs, and that a service plan be established, dismantling monopolies, giving empowerment to wheelchair users.

(Let's as a community make it happen in the 2026-2027 Legislative session)

Lavinia emphasized how important it is for all of us to educate ourselves on what we need to do for ourselves. "It is your body, it is your wheelchair, it is your way to get around."

She was so happy when Mr. Delgado asked her to join the Board of Directors. As a board member, she will bring creative ideas, fresh perspectives, and her nursing experience to the table. She proudly accepted the invitation with the intention of contributing to meaningful discussion and to help make a difference. Lavinia assures the group she will be a listening ear. Anyone can approach her, and she will bring thoughts to the Board's table for discussion. "Let's work together, let's take a stance, let's make a change."

Annual Suffolk County Conference

SILO was proud to participate in the Annual Suffolk County Conference, hosted by the Suffolk County Division of Services for Children with Disabilities. This year's conference focused on "The Birth - 21 Collaborative: Resources for Every Stage," bringing together families, providers, and community organizations to share valuable information, resources,

and activities for people of all abilities. Kirsten Burchard, Assistant Director of NY Connects, and LaShanne Dozier, Director of TRAID, represented SILO at the conference and connected with attendees and fellow organizations. Guest speakers included Parent to Parent, Northwell Health Homes, and The Family and Community Engagement Center (FACE). We are always happy to connect with our community, share information about SILO''s programs and services, and help individuals and families find the resources they need!

The Art of Socializing

By Angel Vasquez

When it comes to human nature, communication is key. It can be positive or negative. This depends on the strategy one uses. For autistic individuals, it is usually a struggle. How do we learn the art of socialization? Do we stay at home, or do we get out into the community? What lessons will we walk away with? Will we be able to work with our parents, guardians, and loved ones to ensure that our physical and psychological needs are met? Such questions present themselves when we are faced with adulthood. As we age, the maturity question becomes larger with the passing days. It can be extremely daunting for most autistic individuals to age and not be able or allowed to explore the outside world. For parents, this can be equally challenging. Especially when they have to think about the numerous obstacles and dangers their child will face while interacting with life itself. Oftentimes, parents tend to make decisions for us. Since the outside world is vast, scary, and filled with negative outcomes, most parents will resort to shielding us from it. They fear that one of these outcomes will severely hurt us once we step outside of their range. I have discovered that whether we spend most of our time at home or in the community, we end up getting hurt anyway. Social isolation is not harmless. It never is. We cannot escape every external threat that comes our way. Every day I spent at home felt like it was another day of my life wasted. I could have been exploring the rest of my community or other parts of Long Island, the place I was born and raised. I would find myself sneaking out of the house with my mountain bike just to get out into the community. Whenever my family was not home, I ceased this opportunity. In those moments, I thought to myself, “If I’m going to get hurt or killed, it’ll be when I am exploring and learning about the outside world.”

For parents, the very thought of their adult child traveling by themselves can be terrifying. When my mother found out that I was sneaking out of the house, she was mortified. Despite this, she was still willing to find a way for me to get out into the community both safely and effectively. When I overexerted myself on a Stairmaster at the Patchogue YMCA, she was equally scared. She feared that I suffered severe heart damage from the exhaustion. As a result, I had to see a cardiologist to check the status of my heart.

Everything was fine. It was just that I have leaky valves. I was given the all clear, and my mother allowed me to go back to the gym and work with my trainer. Not every parent is ready to let their children explore the outside world just yet. My mom acted in a way any loving parent should. More parents need to try and let their kids spread their wings and work with them to achieve their life goals. This has helped my relationship with my mother and has benefited me in a way I never thought would be possible. I now recognize and appreciate the fear and anxiety she has had to overcome to allow me to essentially do my own thing. It took my mother a lot of courage to allow me to get out into the community again.

To grapple with this reality, I followed three steps: Acknowledgement, Acceptance, and Appreciation. For acknowledgement, I had to learn to examine my personal choices and understand my own limitations. Not everyone is able to go to a gym. Some have severe physical limitations that prevent them from doing this. There are things that I could not control, such as the obstacles I encountered when it came to using and retaining my services. For acceptance, it was mandatory for me to deal with societal norms. Others have tried to discourage me from being myself, causing me to lose confidence sometimes. As for appreciation, I've had the pleasure of celebrating my systemic victories by simply living my current newfound life as an active young man.

Now I am able to go to a gym and make and keep new social connections. The gym itself is more than just a place to exercise. It is a place where one can make meaningful friendships. I am currently in the beginning stage of this. For autistic individuals, it can also provide a critical sense of routine and structure. Whether they are paying for a membership themselves or with the help of a state program, the gym should be an essential part of their budget. It gives them an opportunity to discover social dynamics and how to adapt to them. My mother played a crucial role in finding a safe, effective middle ground when it came to navigating the difficult path of obtaining the services that allow me to truly live a self-directed life.

Employee Spotlight:
Melissa Cornell

This month, we honor Melissa Cornell for all her hard work! Melissa is an Independent Living Specialist for the Olmstead Housing Subsidy. Melissa continues to go above and beyond for her participants. She is extremely knowledgeable on all of SILO's programs. She loves what she does and puts her whole heart into it. Thanks for all you do Melissa!

Lori Nelson

This month, we honor Lori Nelson for all her hard work! Lori is a Transition Specialist for the Open Doors program. Staff in her department describe her as "always happy, never

complaining!" She is always willing to lend a hand to keep the program running smoothly. Thanks for all you do Lori!

Upcoming Events:

Virtual Bingo: 11/24, 12/8
Visit our website to register and learn more! www.siloinc.org/siloeventcalendar
Free Fair Housing Training – Hosted by LIHS
Tuesday, November 10th, 2026, 10:00 – 11:30 am
3253 NY-112, Building 10, Medford, NY 11763

Upcoming Closures:

Wednesday, November 25th – Closing at 11:30 am
Thursday, November 26th – Friday, November 27th – Thanksgiving
Monday, December 7th – Hanukkah Observation
Tuesday, December 22nd – Closing at 11:30 am
Wednesday, December 23rd – Friday, January 1st – Holiday Recess
***SILO will reopen on Monday, January 4, 2027*.**

Open Positions:

RTH/OH Housing Specialist - *Housing Department*
RTH/OH Independent Living Specialist - *Housing Department*

To Apply: please email your letter of intent and resume to SILO's Director of Human Resources, Karina Howlin, humanresources@siloinc.org or apply on Indeed.

For more information visit our website: www.siloinc.org/siloemployment