

SILO Newsletter: *September 2026*

A Message from the CEO

SILO's 2026 ADA Celebration: A Celebration of Progress—and a Call to Action

On July 24th, SILO celebrated the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) with more than 800 people in attendance, making this our most successful ADA Celebration ever.

For an organization that has been celebrating the anniversary of the ADA since 1991, this was a remarkable day. More than 30 vendors participated, providing people with disabilities and their families an opportunity to learn firsthand about the services, resources, and opportunities available to them. We were honored to welcome 31 town, county, and state legislators, along with countless community partners, advocates, families, and people with disabilities.

The day was filled with activities for everyone. There were games for children, a petting zoo, demonstrations by the Suffolk County Fire Rescue and Emergency Services, and many other activities that brought our community together. We served more than 600 Jersey Mike's lunches to attendees who wanted something to eat.

But this celebration was about much more than food, entertainment, and a good day in the community. It was a celebration of civil rights, independence, inclusion, and the progress that people with disabilities have fought for over generations.

The Americans with Disabilities Act, signed into law in 1990, established a fundamental principle: people with disabilities are entitled to participate fully in American society and to have the same civil rights and opportunities as everyone else. It opened doors that had been closed for far too long.

But 36 years after the ADA became law, we still have a very long way to go. The rights guaranteed by the ADA cannot be protected simply by celebrating its anniversary once a year. They must be defended every day.

Today, the programs and services that make independent living possible are increasingly vulnerable. Programs at both the state and federal levels are facing cuts, restrictions, caps, or inadequate funding. Many organizations providing essential services have been level-funded for years, while the cost of operating those programs continues to rise. In real terms, that means they are being asked to do more with less.

And we have to be honest about what that means. When funding for independent living, housing, transportation, assistive technology, employment, and other disability services is reduced, it is people with disabilities who pay the price.

These are not abstract budget numbers. These are people's lives. They determine whether someone can remain in their own home instead of entering a nursing facility. Whether someone can get to work. Whether a student can transition successfully from school to employment. Whether a person can obtain

the technology or equipment they need to live independently. Whether someone has the opportunity to participate in their community on an equal basis.

We cannot allow the progress of the past 36 years to be quietly dismantled. Our disability community has fought too hard and too long to accept cuts to the programs that make independent living possible. We must once again rise up, organize, and make our voices heard. We need to pay attention. We need to be informed. And we need to become politically active.

Know what is happening in Albany. Know what is happening in Washington. Know what legislation is being proposed. Know which programs are being threatened and how those decisions will affect our community. And most importantly, let our elected officials know that we are watching. We need to remind our legislators that people with disabilities are not an afterthought, a budget line, or a population to be marginalized when times get difficult.

We are constituents. We are voters. We are taxpayers. We are employees, employers, parents, students, consumers, neighbors, and members of this community. We deserve the same opportunity to live, work, raise our families, participate in our communities, and pursue our dreams as every other American.

The ADA gave us a foundation. But laws on paper do not create equality by themselves. People create change. People defend their rights. And people who organize and refuse to remain silent can make their elected officials listen.

So, I leave everyone with this message: Become informed. Get involved. Speak up. Contact your legislators. Challenge policies that threaten our independence. And stand together. Because, if we remain silent, decisions will be made for us. And when it comes to protecting our civil rights and our ability to live independently in the community, tomorrow may be too late.

Joseph M. Delgado

Chief Executive Officer

A Source of Support

By: Judy Wieber

To quote the words of Carol King: "When you are down and troubled, and you need a helping hand, and nothing, nothing is going right. Close your eyes and..."

How do you fill in the rest of this thought? Do you think of someone close to you? Do you say a prayer? How about exercise? Do you take a walk to clear your head? Will you call a friend, or put some music on and dance?

What if you do not have a way to get out of these feelings of trouble and doubt? What do you do then?

I invite you all to attend one of SILO'S support groups. Here, we talk and listen. It is an opportunity to untie the knot of your balloon, of 'trouble', and let all the air out before it gets too big. The "Start the Conversation" support group creates a safe place for everyone to vent, rant, and share strategies and create our own supports; a hypothetical ladder, if you will, to climb out of a hole of uncertainty. It allows

you to look at your situation and realize that no matter the struggle, we are not alone. No one in this world gets out of here without something pressing to deal with. We empower ourselves with knowledge and come up with a plan. We can set goals and know that our group is there to support, not judge. We realize life has struggles, and sometimes, we can have trouble reaching our goals, but if we do not give up, we can overcome the darkness that might be troubling us or stopping us from having a better quality of life.

Support groups are a wonderful way to make friends and socialize with others who may be in similar situations. I can say this is true of Marilyn's peer support group. It can deepen understanding of another's reality. Belonging to a group doesn't cost anything; it shows you are caring for yourself and your community. They foster belonging, loyalty, and commitment. It is a way to give back and a way to receive. And why not? We are all worth it, right?

If interested in attending, please contact SILO at (631) 880-7929, extension 165, Erick Dreher, LMSW, facilitator of Start the Conversation, or extension 183, Marilyn Tucci, Peer Support facilitator. Or visit our website at www.siloinc.org, to learn more.

Self-Advocacy: A Tool for Individuality

By Angel Vasquez

The summer season is coming to a close once again. Hobbies and priorities fill the social atmosphere. Plans begin to take shape, whether those plans involve traveling or just staying local. In the midst of all of this, one conflict within the human mind comes into view: weighing options vs settling for less. Such a thing is as old as the existence of thought itself. If we are not careful, however, we could find ourselves blurring the line between the two. However, through the power of self-advocacy, we will reveal the ins and outs of decision making.

Ever since I first began exploring more of the outside world through my program, Self Direction, I have been faced with this conflict at every turn, whether my support staff and I traveled locally or not. There was a point in time when nothing else was happening in regard to my other services like getting a gym membership and taking driving lessons. This all came to a head in August of last year. As I was conducting my usual ten-mile walk at the Patriots Preserve in Shirley, I wondered when I would be able to go to a gym and take driving lessons. It had already been five months. The very thought of this aggravated me to my core. I started writing out emails to the people at the organization I am with. All I wanted was to get answers.

Before I knew it, the pieces began to fall into place. I was finally allowed to explore more of my options. Slowly, I started receiving clues for which direction to look in. I was given an address that I searched for

on Google Maps, and it led me to a personal trainer who operates a gym in her trailer. She drives to where her clients live and places them on a workout and diet plan. Even though she could not fit me into her schedule, she was able to direct me to another woman who owns a fitness training business. That is how I was able to acquire a trainer. I just had to acquire a gym membership.

At first, there were voices advising me to go to the Shirley Planet Fitness in my area. However, I did not want to go to that gym. I spoke to my academic coach about this. He suggested that I could go to a YMCA gym in Patchogue. From there, I began looking into it. I traveled with my support staff to the Patchogue YMCA to see if I would be interested in exercising there. The next week, I gave their guest pass a try. The first day I entered the YMCA gym area, I found myself exploring my surroundings. It was actually the first time I ever navigated my way through a gym. I examined every workout station in order to get a sense of it all. Slowly but surely, I did. I started going through a workout routine set up by my academic coach. This time, I knew exactly which workout stations to use. It was like clockwork.

That was until I arrived at the Patchogue YMCA with my trainer. Since the YMCA has their own trainers, my trainer had to sign up for a guest account at the front desk. This meant that after a few days, he would have to pay for a membership. Once he and I entered the gym, I got extremely nervous, mainly because this was the first time I ever went to a gym with a personal trainer. Because of this, I decided to go on a Stairmaster for ten full minutes. I pushed myself way too hard, and I had to be hospitalized. Thankfully, I came out in one piece. What I should have done was make my trainer aware of my anxiety. That way, I could learn more about my own limitations. In addition, it would not have been sustainable for my trainer, either. As a result, I had to cancel the YMCA membership days later.

A few months later, my support staff and I spoke with one another about what my next gym experience would look like. One day, we traveled to the Medford Planet Fitness. I was very reluctant at first, mainly because it is a Planet Fitness gym. As I walked in, I was astonished by how much more space it had. I shook the manager's hand, and she gave us a tour of the gym. I made it a point to develop a relationship with the manager. This way, when something does happen, the manager will be more receptive, and it will increase the quality of my advocacy. Upon leaving, I made the informed decision that this is the gym I wanted to go to, whether by myself or with my trainer. In order for my trainer to go there with me, I had to enroll for a Black Card membership. Unlike the YMCA, my personal trainer was and still is able to work with me as a guest without being required to pay for a membership.

Eventually, and unfortunately, I had to make the hard decision to settle for the Planet Fitness gym in Shirley. Two days into my attendance there, I began to encounter issues. When I called the front desk and asked for the manager, the woman informed me that the manager was off that day. Since this gym has only one manager, I had to wait for five days before I got in touch with him. When I spoke to the manager, he listened to my concerns and resolved the matter to my surprise. He was even aware of a review I submitted for the gym. He also said that I could speak with him further if any other issues arise. Like at the Medford Planet Fitness, the manager knows who I am.

As for my driving lessons, I finally received a call from my driving instructor at Fitzgerald's Driving School. We discussed how we would go about my driving lessons. When I officially began these driving lessons, my driving instructor and I became acclimated with one another and worked on areas that needed improvement. Despite the shortcomings of the invoice process, I was able to lessen the severity by checking in with the driving school and my agency. Both my mother and I made sure that the driving school received their payments. Otherwise, I would have lost their service. That is why one must remain vigilant and stay on top of matters. This serves as another form of self-advocacy.

Overall, self-advocacy is a form of defense, not a luxury. Things did not turn out exactly the way I wanted. But that should not stop anyone from speaking up for themselves and thriving.

Procrastination is never an option when it comes to self-advocacy. In order for us to live rather than simply survive, we need to make our desires and our boundaries known. Both of these are what make a self-directed life a reality. It is what makes my journey toward independence possible.

League of Women Voters Presentation

Marilyn Tucci, Director of Advocacy, and Kirsten Burchard, Assistant Director of NY Connects, attended a meeting with the League of Women Voters on August 19th. Marilyn spoke about advocacy and the impact "One Vote" can have on an election. Marilyn went into voting dating back to 1645. Kirsten read information Marilyn provided that highlighted the impact One Vote can have on elections. For example: one vote made the decision in 1800 of the president, it was between Thomas Jefferson or Aaron Burr. Together, they discussed all the programs and services that are offered at SILO.

Commemorating the ADA Signing

By Judith Wieber

On Friday, July 24, 2026, SILO celebrated the 36th anniversary of the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Approximately 700 SILO participants, families, friends, vendors, legislators, and SILO Staff gathered on our grounds under the big tent to commemorate the civil rights of people with disabilities. All enjoyed a lunch provided by Jersey Mikes, ice cream sandwiches sponsored by Old Fashion Ice Cream, popped popcorn from Regal Cinemas, and more. A petting zoo, face painting, and handcrafted balloon animals were part of the fun and excitement of the day. Over 50 gifts were also raffled, donated by many local (and one not-so-local) businesses. The Brookhaven fire department was on hand with water fun and Suffolk County ID cards.

Several state and county legislators stopped by to support the work of SILO and make themselves available to the community.

This year, the Suffolk County Board of Elections demonstrated accessible voting machines. Marilyn Tucci assisted by gathering participants for a sneak peek at these accessible touch screens and directing new registrants to voting registration forms. The Board of Election staff walked anyone who wanted to try through how to use the machines with a sample contest. They are 100% ADA compliant.

Though many legislators spoke, the words of Senator Martinez really captured the thoughts of the day:

“Over the past year, SILO has helped over 20,000 individuals with disabilities and their families throughout the region. A number that has seen a significant increase as people seek assistance to overcome the continuing obstacles they face each day. The reality is, even with laws to expand protections, true equality is still a work in progress, and we are not at a point where the goal has been completely realized. The ADA has improved lives for people with disabilities over the past 36 years and will continue to push us toward the full inclusion that our founders placed at the core of our fledgling nation at its founding.”

The act was passed and signed into law by President George H. W. Bush on July 26, 1990. In the past, I have posted actual footage of the signing ceremony. I post it again here as an excellent reminder of our history, as members of the United States with disabilities:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2IHTvnlqhc>

Another thing I have done in past issues is write about another event that occurred in March of 1990, prior to the signing of the ADA. Here is actual footage of the Capital Crawl:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ND3bAyuWdKc>

This peaceful yet powerful demonstration is the true spirit of what we can do with the desire for change. It is an excellent reminder of our history and what others before us have done to help us in obtaining life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Employee Spotlight:

Amanda Romahn

We honor Amanda Romahn for all her hard work! Amanda is the Education & Outreach Coordinator for the Open Doors Program. She is always willing to lend a hand and will not stop until the task is completed. She is the one to go to when you need assistance! Thanks for all you do, Amanda!

Ryan Criscione

We honor Ryan Criscione for all her hard work! Ryan is the NHTD Regional Lead for the Regional Resource Development Center. She is very dedicated to her team and the participants she serves. Ryan consistently steps up to help her team when the workload builds up. She has created a supportive and positive work environment. Thanks for all you do, Ryan!

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 Renaldo, humanresources@siloinc.org or apply on Indeed.

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

Upcoming Events:

Virtual Bingo: 9/29, 10/13, 10/27, 11/24, 12/8

Visit our website to register and learn more! www.siloinc.org/events

SILO's 8th Self-Advocacy Conference

Tuesday, October 6th, 2026, 8:00 am – 2:30 pm

Holiday Inn Long Island - 1730 N Ocean Ave, Holtsville, NY 11742

<https://www.siloinc.org/selfadvocacyconference>

Upcoming Closures:

Friday, September 4th – closing at 11:00 am

Monday, September 7th – Labor Day

Monday, September 14th – Rosh Hashanah Observation

Monday, September 21st – Yom Kippur

Monday, October 12th – Indigenous Peoples' Day