Technology is an ever present part of everyone’s life. For people with disabilities technology can mean more independence. Technology has had a profound impact on my life. Without it I could not fully participate in society.

The first piece of technology that has had a big impact on my life was my first power wheelchair. I received it when I was in high school. Previously, I had used a manual wheelchair. I would push myself very slowly. I would ask those around me to push me to and from where I wanted to go. This severely curtailed my independence. Once I had a power wheelchair, I could go anywhere I wanted within my home, school or wider community without having to make sure there was someone around to help me. Some people look down on others who use wheelchairs as mobility aids. I view my wheelchair as my ticket to freedom.

The second piece of technology that has improved my life is text-to-speech software. This software allows me to speak to my computer and dictate documents. This program helped me further my education. There is no way I would have been able to keep up with my course load without it. It allowed me compose documents as fast as my mind could work. I have used this software consistently since my time at Dowling and have not looked back since.

This edition of the newsletter will focus on technology and how it helps people with disabilities interact with the world around them. It will feature articles
about different tools that people with disabilities use to express themselves. This edition features an article about different apps that those with disabilities use to make their lives easier.

I hope you enjoy!
What’s Dis App
By: Sophia Ardi

In the modern day of technology that we live in, there exists many modules to help those who are disabled lead easier, more accessible lives. We live in a world where smart phones play an intricate role in how we live our days and because of this the disabled community can use the different applications available to their advantage. In navigating the twists and turns of life, I have found certain apps to be particularly useful. Although these apps are helpful, there is definitely some improvement that can be made. Let me give you an example:

My brother called me recently and asked if I wanted to meet him for a late lunch. He lives in New Jersey and I live in Eastern Long Island. We decided to meet halfway to make the trip easier for both of us. I told him I’d make arrangements. I used Google to find a restaurant that was halfway between our locations. Being on a budget I looked on Groupon for any discounts or promotions. Yelp provided details on Tesoro’s restaurant which included hours of operation, customer reviews, address, directions, and other additional information that would promote the business. I checked the weather on News 12 to make sure I wouldn’t get caught in the rain with my wheelchair. We got in the car and my aide turned on Waze and punched in the address for directions to the restaurant. This app provided the time it would take to get to the restaurant, the quickest way to go, if there were any accidents, obstacles or policeman we needed to watch for on the way. I turned on Pandora, sat back and enjoyed the ride. During our visit at the restaurant, we used Snapchat to share with the rest of the family the great time we were having. We also used the camera in our phones to take pictures for a memory book. In this scenario eight applications provided information that would have taken hours to research took maybe a half-hour to plan with minimal to no stress.

While the 8 applications I chose to help me were user-friendly and provided for a wonderful time, there were shortcomings. As we work to further promote community integration, applications have been and continue to be developed by local and federal entities. Those of us in the trenches not only contribute to that expansion, but have actually established new applications. This firsthand experience as to the deficits that face the disabled community has provided more exposure and awareness and can only result in further advancement. The category of apps that focus primarily to support those with various physical and cognitive challenges, I refer to as Dis Apps. These apps are not the applications you need to fill out for government support services, but rather applications that are used to further support integration and provide more independence to individuals.

Transportation is a vital part of our daily life. Social, personal, or professional outings will require some mode of travel. Listed below are some agencies that will support local transportation

**AGENCY:**  **NYC Metropolitan Transit Authority**  Dis-App:  **MYmta**

Here is the official Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) guide to accessible mass transit in NYC:
The MTA Trip Planner page will help you plan your commute from one point to another. Just make sure you select the “Accessible Trip” option: http://tripplanner.mta.info/

**AGENCY: Suffolk County Transit**

Here is the website for the Suffolk County Accessible Transit Bus Services (SCAT) that lists require appointments for bus service: [www.sct-bus.org/scat.html](http://www.sct-bus.org/scat.html)

Information includes bus route & schedule info, fares, large print schedules and other general information

**AGENCY Suffolk County Bus (Line Bus) Dis-App: TransLoc Rider**

Here you can track your bus and get accurate arrival predictions on your mobile phone. Save your favorite stops and routes and set custom alerts. Receive important system-wide announcements about Suffolk County Transit service.

Plan your trip with Suffolk County Transit Call 511 Transit Trip Planner

I’ve provided some basic information as a starting point for some of the most used public transportation services for the disability community in Suffolk County and New York City. Nassau County will be added to our next edition. Upgrades and new applications are underway and are expected in the near future. Look forward to the next issue which will include other modes of transportation.
I had the opportunity to interview Amy Menditto, who runs the NY Connects program here at SILO. She began working at SILO four years ago when the grant that supplied the funds for Money Follows the Person (MFP) was taken over by SILO.

I wanted to know what her favorite part of working with NY Connects is. She said, “My staff and the work that we do here.” I also wanted to know what a typical workday looked like. Amy said, “Each day is different.” Since NY Connects is a call center she makes sure the phones are staffed to receive calls from current and potential consumers. Staff also visits people’s homes to inform them about the services that NY Connects provides. NY Connects also does outreach at local soup kitchens and food pantries. They also work with the police department and the Department of Social Services homeless liaison. On average, NY Connects assists 200 people a month. This translates to approximately 2,400 individuals helped annually.

Amy considers one of NY Connects greatest success stories to be the retention rate of her employees. In the two years she has been running the program only one person has left NY Connects. A couple people have left the NY Connects department but have returned or are planning to return soon. This leads to a family atmosphere within NY Connects and SILO in general.

SILO recently held its third annual self-advocacy conference. Amy helped run the event with the chair of the Barrier Busters committee, Justin Ainsworth. I was curious about how she thought it went. She praised the event, “I think it was the most successful one to date. We had a lot of great keynote speakers which brought in many consumers who enjoyed the event.” Amy believes the event was very well received.

I was curious about what she liked to do outside of work. She loves being outdoors and on the water. She enjoys kayaking and hiking. One thing you may not know about her is that she went skydiving with her family once. She will never do it again.

Amy would describe herself as loyal, adventurous and friendly. In my time spent with her I would have to wholeheartedly agree. It was clear to me that Amy loves what she does. She is a clear asset to the SILO team.
Amy Menditto, Director of NY Connects & ILC
Justin Ainsworth is the chair of the Barrier Busters committee. It was established in 2014. He helps individuals file complaints against businesses so they are made to be in compliance with the ADA. In 2001, Justin was involved in a car accident that left him permanently disabled. Tina Behnstedt provided him with benefits counseling. After going to school for social work at Stony Brook University he returned as an intern. He has been with SILO since 2015. What he enjoys most about working here is the comradery.

In Justin’s opinion, the best victory the Barrier Busters committee has achieved so far is getting an accessible bathroom put into the club house of a retirement community. The committee also got a pool lift installed.

An example of a current fight for equal access that the Barrier Busters played a big part in was when they tried to help a woman get a ramp installed outside her rented condominium. The Barrier Busters worked with the waiver program to get the funds necessary for the installation of the ramp. The complex refused to sign off on the work even though it was of no cost to them. The woman who requested the ramp now has put out a modular ramp every time she wants to leave her home. Disability Rights New York has filed suit against the complex for discrimination. This lawsuit will cost the complex more money and time then just signing off on the work would have.

I wanted to know what his proudest moments were both personally and at SILO. His proudest moment personally was graduating from Stony Brook University. His proudest moment professionally was successfully running SILO’s first Self-Advocacy conference. He said, “I was glad that it ran well.” He is hard at work putting together this year’s conference. There are several workshops planned. Motivational speaker Hector Picard and the father and son team behind John’s Crazy Socks will give the keynotes.

I also wanted to know how he would improve the ADA. He had this to say, “Probably that it would have more teeth. More consequences for people not being compliant.”

I also asked how he thought people with disabilities could be better integrated into society. He would like to see people with disabilities represented even more in the media. He has noticed improvement in the 10 to 15 years but if more was done recruiters would not be so hesitant to hire someone with a disability because they would see them as part of their everyday life. “If they’re out in the community and
people talk to them, they’re apt to feel more comfortable when they’re in their office looking for a job.” Justin said.

It was a pleasure to get to know Justin Ainsworth better. He is a prime example of the spirit of independence and advocacy that SILO was built on.

Justin Ainsworth (left), Chairman of the Barrier Busters committee
SILO has many programs that help people achieve independence and live within their communities. One of these programs is the Olmstead Housing Subsidy,

Lori Corrar, the director of the Olmstead Housing Subsidy, describes the program as:

The Olmstead Housing Subsidy (OHS) program assists eligible individuals by providing a rental subsidy to aid in supporting community living. Since the inception of OHS (2016), the Long Island region has assisted 28 individuals in transitioning to community living. Eligible participants of the program are those enrolled in Medicaid who are in need of nursing home level of care, are homeless or unstably housed, have spent at least one hundred twenty (120) consecutive days in a nursing home over the most recent two-year period, and who have the ability to live safely in the community. The program’s housing specialists provide community outreach to nursing homes, community organizations, and potential landlords, as well as aid in the search and leasing process of apartments while offering support through the transition phase from nursing home to independent living.

The Olmstead Housing Subsidy’s funding was made available as part of the Medicaid Redesign Team’s Supportive Housing Workgroup 2014-15 allocation plan. Modeled after the Housing Choice Voucher and NHTD programs, participants utilizing the subsidy pay approximately 30% of their monthly income towards their rent. There is also funding available for “community transition services” which includes security deposits, moving expenses, utility payments and household establishment purchases.

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A consumer reached out to thank the Olmstead Housing Subsidy reached out to thank SILO for helping her leave a nursing home and move into her community:

To Whom It May Concern:

After numerous hours of research, I came across Olmsted Subsidy Housing Program. This program helped me transition out of the nursing home safely. It enabled me to have a roof over my
head, be independent, and have a sense of security. I no longer have a fear of displacement. It feels good to be living in my own house without the mental and verbal stress of a nursing home. I have gained back my sense of self-respect. Thanks to the SILO team!

Yours truly,

Dianne Bennett
On October 18, 2018 SILO held its third annual Self-advocacy conference. The conference seeks to connect people with disabilities with services and networking to increase their self-reliance. It is run by Justin Ainsworth the chairperson of the Barrier Busters committee. The third iteration of the conference was the most successful yet. There were 75 participants.

The day began with a keynote speech by John and Mark Cronin, the father and son team behind John’s Crazy Socks. John the son of the team, is a young man living with Down syndrome. He started the business to spread happiness through socks. The goal of the company is to show the gifts that everyone possesses regardless of ability. John is the face of the company and encompasses everything that the company represents.

Mark X. Cronin works behind the scenes at John’s Crazy Socks, Mark has extensive experience developing innovative organizations with a focus on customers. Above all, he is a dad proud to be working with his son.

Mark X. Cronin’s career combines public service, technology and innovation. He is the President of Paumonok Innovations Inc. the parent company of John’s Crazy Socks. Paumonok develops online information sites and niche stores. Mark has a history of developing digital offerings. He is proud to bring these skills to John’s Crazy Socks.

In their keynote speech John and Mark discussed the mission statement behind John’s Crazy Socks. The goal of John’s Crazy Socks is to empower those with disabilities. John and Mark wanted to show that people with disabilities could be gainfully employed and could work side by side with able-bodied people. They build their business around the strengths of their employees. They also build their business on establishing a connection with their customers. They do this by including a personal note with each package.

John and Mark also seek to give back to charity through making their business profitable. They believe that profitability and charitable giving is not mutually exclusive. One of the charities they love to support is the Special Olympics due to John being an athlete with the organization for quite some time. The experiences he has had with this organization has formed the man he is.

John and Mark Cronin enjoyed being part of SILO’s self-advocacy conference. John had this to say about the conference, “I felt so inspired speaking with the self-advocates at SILO.”
SILO staff photo
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Mark Cronin echoed John’s thoughts, “We felt honored to be able to speak at the SILO conference because SILO does such important work. We share a vision of showing what people...”
ple with differing abilities can do.”

I sat in on several of the workshops. Marilyn Tucci, the chair of SILO’s transportation committee and Frank Krotschinsky, Esq. held a workshop about advocating for more accessible public transportation. Mr. Krotschinsky is currently the Director of the Suffolk County Office for People with Disabilities. They heard concerns about the public transportation system. The main concerns participants expressed were regarding access to bus service and how to navigate the public transportation system. Marilyn was able to assuage people’s fears by focusing on the participant’s strengths. One of the participants was concerned about navigating the line bus system because they were unfamiliar with it. Marilyn reassured the participant that through practice she could learn how to use the public transportation system.

Several of the participants shared tips about how they navigate the public transportation system. Marilyn also emphasized the importance of advocating for yourself. She also shared a story that demonstrated what to do if advocating and preplanning a trip does not work out the way you had hoped. One day on her commute to SILO Marilyn told the bus driver that she wanted to be dropped off outside of the building. The driver was not paying attention and dropped her off outside the 7-11. Her guide dog was able to lead her the rest of the way. This story highlights how vital it is for bus drivers to continue to receive training about passengers with disabilities. It is also important be-
cause it would expand the transportation options beyond paratransit, which comes with its own drawbacks.

Frank Krotschinsky spoke about the eligibility requirements for SCAT. He encouraged the participants to use the fixed route buses whenever possible because it would give them more freedom of movement. The main reasons that Mr. Krotschinsky gave for supporting public transportation over paratransit is cost and convenience. When someone uses paratransit they have to book their rides one to five days in advance. It is also considerably cheaper than SCAT.

I also sat in on the Third Eye Insight adaptive martial arts program taught by Devin Fernandez. Mr. Fernandez has been a practitioner of the martial art of Ninpo Ninjutsu for 17 years. He understands the importance of an active lifestyle for blind people. Mr. Fernandez also believes it is important for visually impaired and blind people to be able to defend themselves. The mission of Third Eye Insight is to, “Is to help build physical strength and endurance, instill self-confidence, promote independence, self-esteem and empower blind and visually impaired individuals with the tools they can use to be successful at setting goals and managing life’s challenges.”

Hector Picard also spoke at the conference. Mr.
Picard is a motivational speaker and triathlete. He became a bilateral amputee after a work related accident. After his accident, he had to learn how to take care of himself all over again. As part of his recovery he turned to triathlons in order to challenge himself. His disability has taught him how to fully embrace life. In order to get to this positive point in his life Hector suffered many hardships. His mantra throughout it all has been, “Don’t stop living.” He embodies this saying by competing in over 140 triathlons. The main takeaway from his speech was that we can all achieve our goals even if they seem impossible. We may not all want to be a world-class athlete but we should not let our limitations prevent us from dreaming big.

In addition to the speakers and workshops, there was a screening of a clip from the documentary Gang of 19. It was facilitated by Kathryn Carroll. Ms. Carroll works as a Policy Analyst for the Center for Disability Rights. Gang of 19 tells the story of the beginning of ADAPT and its successful fight to get ramps put on all of Colorado’s public busses. Ms. Carroll also explained how ADAPT achieves its goal of fighting for and protecting the civil rights of people with disabilities. They accomplish these goals by using several methods. The method that was highlighted in the clip from the documentary was direct action.
Kathryn Carroll enjoyed her experience presenting at the conference. “I am pleased that SILO has devoted the resources to making this conference happen. Long Island’s disabled residents face their unique challenges to self-advocacy and protecting and furthering disability rights, and self-advocates need to organize now more than ever. Long Islanders with disabilities should know that their voices matter, and responding to calls to action are important. They should also support Long Island ADAPT to mobilize for disability justice.”

After the conference, I followed up with Justin to get his thoughts about how he thought the conference went. Justin Ainsworth, “I think it went really well. I think we had a great turnout. The speakers were amazing. The sponsors were saying how good it was and what a good turnout we had.”

Justin also said that several of the sponsors were eager to tell other businesses about the conference due to the popularity of it. Planning meetings for the next conference began in January. The fourth annual conference is slated to be held on October 17, 2019.

I enjoyed my first experience at the self-advocacy conference. It is the essence of what SILO does. It continues to strengthen SILO’s commitment to the disability community.

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