

# INDEPENDENCE TIMES

*Newsletter of the Regional Center for Independent Living, Inc. / Summer 2021*

## Benefits Advisement: A Critical Service During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Without a doubt, this has been one of the most stressful and difficult times for everyone in our community. Whether you lost your job due to the COVID-19 pandemic, are struggling to make this month's rent, find attendant service coverage, or put enough food on the table for your family; we have all needed some help, and that's "OKAY."

At the Regional Center for Independent Living, we have staff available to assist and provide you and your family on-going support, no matter your situation. That said, one of the most frequently requested services at RCIL during the pandemic continues to be Benefits Advisement. Our Benefits Specialist, Darlene Berry, helped many people apply for financial assistance to cover rent and other critical needs.

In April, Darlene completed the prestigious Work Incentive Practitioner Credential Program through Cornell University's ILR School. After a 15-week online course with plenty of homework and a case study, she passed the exam and earned her certification. Darlene is already applying what she learned from this training to her work at RCIL and assisting people to maximize their SSI and SSDI benefits. She loves to share her knowledge and provide the most up-to-date information. Following is some key information that everyone should know.

**Did you know...**in March 2020, the Social Security Administration (SSA), closed all offices to the public due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Benefit suspension and terminations were not processed during this time, which is why more overpayment debts are now being pursued and collected by SSA.

**Also did you know...**in order to address overpayments that were not the fault of the individual, due to either financial, residential, or employment changes as a result of COVID-19, SSA published Special Waiver Rules for COVID Related Overpayments. If the SSI or SSDI overpayment occurred between March 1, 2020 and September 2020, SSA can waive recovery of the overpayment. If the overpayment meets the criteria, any amount of overpayment is eligible for consideration under this interim rule.



*Benefits Specialist  
Darlene Berry.*

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**[www.rcil.org](http://www.rcil.org)**

**497 State Street  
Rochester, NY 14608**

**(585) 442-6470**

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## Dear Friends,

*Independence Times* provides our readers valuable information about RCIL programs and ongoing advocacy efforts - ensuring people with disabilities can be independent and integrated in the community.

Our featured story highlights the critical service of Benefits Advisement. Be sure to read about our featured staff member. Please contact us to learn how you can get involved at RCIL.

*Bruce E. Darling*

## Benefits Advisement Continued

**And did you know...**that having a trained advocate, such as Darlene, can help you to navigate the complexities of the SSI and SSDI programs and the SSA system?

If you want to know more, please call the Regional Center for Independent Living at 585-442-6470, and ask for Darlene Berry, Benefits Specialist. Or you may email her at [dberry@rcil.org](mailto:dberry@rcil.org). She is available to you for help and additional information. Darlene works from our Rochester office, as well as our satellite office in Geneva, to ensure that she is accessible to the consumers in the outlying counties.



## Are you interested in getting involved with us?

**You can help by:**

- **Donating**
- **Volunteering at Events**

**You can join our:**

- **Advocacy Efforts**
- **Committees**

**Don't forget to like, follow, and share us on social media!**

**Ask us how you can get involved!**

**We are not-for profit organizations working to keep people with disabilities living independently in the community, with help from services and support they may need.**

UPCOMING  
EVENTS

Stay tuned for upcoming events.

They will be announced  
on [www.cdrnys.org](http://www.cdrnys.org)  
and on social media.

## Staff Highlight — Rhonda Fumia

Meet Rhonda Fumia, one of our two Peer Specialists in our Peer Integration Program. She has a long history of working in the human services field prior to joining us in October 2019. Rhonda was seeking a new opportunity, where she could advocate for others, and use her life experiences with a disability to help her peers.



Peer Integration Specialist  
Rhonda Fumia.

The Peer Specialists were temporarily relocated from the ACCES-VR office during COVID-19 and continued to provide peer services from our 497 State Street office. Rhonda is a big part of the success in the first year of the new five-year Peer Integration Project contract. Year one was in the middle of the pandemic; yet the Peers were able to serve 146 VR participants and provide 1,002 individual peer services. Rhonda was fantastic at going outside her typical scope of services, in order to meet participants' needs during the pandemic. This required a lot of outside the box thinking.

As a result of her experiences working during COVID-19, she has become a valuable resource for her team, as well as for her participants.

Fun fact about Rhonda: she has a great sense of humor and loves to tell jokes!

### Newsletter Accessibility:

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter in an alternate format, including:

- Braille
- Large print

Contact Linda Taylor:  
[Ltaylor@cdrnys.org](mailto:Ltaylor@cdrnys.org)

### Upcoming Board Meeting

August 19, 2021  
1:00pm-3:00pm  
497 State Street  
Rochester, NY 14608

**All board meetings will be conducted on Zoom, until further notice.**

497 State Street  
Rochester, NY 14608  
(585) 546-7510



/RCILNYS



@RCILNY



RCIL Rochester



[rcil.org](http://rcil.org)

*This year, give a gift  
that lives on year-round.*

### Annual Giving

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- ☐ Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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The Regional Center for Independent Living  
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RCIL works for the full integration, independence, and civil rights of people with disabilities.

### **Become a Member of RCIL today!**

**Membership year 11/1 - 10/31. Minimum contribution \$10 per year.**

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