By this point it’s common knowledge that the CDC has approved vaccines to fight against COVID-19. But everyone should know their rights when it comes to vaccines and about what the vaccination process might look like if you choose the vaccine route. But the biggest question most people are asking is, “is this vaccine for me?” There are many reasons why people are concerned about getting the recently approved vaccines, and if I were to list them, we would take up this whole issue of the newsletter. But this article is to help provide everyone with more information about the process of getting the vaccine, and the rights you have when it comes to getting vaccines. At the end of this article do not expect me to tell you what you should do, because that is up to you.

It is your right to choose if you want to get the vaccine or not. There have been rumors going around that individuals are going to be forced to take the vaccine, I know, because I have heard them with my own ears. However, these are not true because the government cannot force you to get vaccinated. It should be noted that employers can require their employees to be
vaccinated before they can return to work. This choice must be made by you, because you understand your individual situation best. Individuals might have questions or concerns because of having pre-existing medical conditions. In cases like this, it is suggested that if you have questions or concerns about how your body is going to react to the vaccine, the best thing to do is to ask your doctor what effects you might experience due to your pre-existing conditions.

If you choose the vaccine route, this might be how the process will be for you. First, you will want to pre-register on https://covidvaccine.nj.gov/. On this site, it will have you fill out a questionnaire that will figure out what phase you are in to receive the vaccine. Filling out this questionnaire will place you on the list to get an email alert to when there are available appointments for the phase of New Jersey’s vaccination plan you are in. The other way people have gotten appointments is by calling the local vaccination sites and requesting an appointment. To get at up-to-date information about the vaccine and list of vaccination sites, go to https://covid19.nj.gov/ and click on the vaccine info button. Information about COVID-19 or the vaccine can also be found by dialing 2-1-1. When asking if sites were able to accommodate individuals with disabilities, it was recommended that the individual or their supports should contact that site they plan to make an appointment with and ask if the site can accommodate for their individual needs. All sites should be accessible for those using a wheelchair, scooter or walker. In addition, please ask for an additional accommodation if needed to improve the conditions of your vaccine appointment. Please contact us here at The Progressive Center for Independent Living (609-581-4500) if your location is or was not accessible. More resources on the Covid-19 and information on the vaccine for individuals with developmental disabilities can be found at the Boggs Center for Developmental Disabilities website: https://rwjms.rutgers.edu/boggscenter/ or by phone 732-235-9300.

I am not going to tell you what your choice should be. However, I do hope that this has helped you understand that you have a right to choose if you want the vaccine or not, and provided a glimpse of the process of how you can get vaccinated if you choose to.

At the time this article was written there have been issues around the timely supply of the vaccine that has had a negative impact on the schedule, making appointments and getting through to someone with questions. Please follow the information provided by the state of NJ at https://covid19.nj.gov/ and be patient. This is an undertaking unlike any other in our lifetimes, you have all shown strength and perseverance for many months, we will make it to a better place in time.

■ Vasilia Patsourakis
Pandemic or not, it truly matters that older adults pay attention to their well-being. During times such as we are currently experiencing it may make it more of a challenge to manage. Gerontology research, studies, and media outlets (to include social media) have highlighted the impact of social isolation and loneliness long before the pandemic of 2020. The intrusion and serious nature of COVID-19 served to catapult issues surrounding older adults, once again, into the spotlight. While the unimaginable scourge of sickness and resulting deaths of those in nursing facilities stole so many from us, what became more crystallized was sort of a dichotomy – that of the resiliency of many older adults. If ever a silver lining to such an unprecedented event can occur, a resounding vote for taking care of one’s well-being is here and now! So how is this accomplished? In a December weekend issue of the Wall Street Journal, Alison Gopnick explored this premise in her article “Despite COVID-19, Older People are Still Happier.” She explains perhaps because of exposure to lifelong experiences, whenever adverse events occur, older adults respond with calm concern and responsible reasoning. Reliance on technology became a necessity to one’s maintenance of their well-being. And the word ZOOM has taken on a whole new meaning of its own! Communication about essential basic services, with family members now kept at a distance and with our social circles, technology was an immediate need. Older adults welcomed the ability to FaceTime family, reunite with
friends/coworkers via ZOOM, log in online to receive immediate news of vaccine availability and health concerns and, most importantly, allow one to keep learning and experiencing that which is purposeful, productive and enjoyable. This ability is essential to one’s well-being.

Many organizations have further helped tackle social isolation by completely pivoting their operations to virtual outreach. Some examples follow:

- The State of New Jersey’s Division of Aging Services established a new fundable service (taxonomy) embracing Assistive technology for older adults.

- National and Regional Alzheimer’s organizations have sponsored free webinars, support groups and forums. The Alzheimer’s Foundation sends weekly schedules for those with early stage memory loss/dementia to join in adapted exercise classes, cooking demonstrations, armchair travel and entertainment of all sorts.

- Trenton senior centers shared health and wellness programming; Interfaith Caregivers of Mercer County were able to continue their popular Project Healthy Bones as participants connected remotely.

- This writer attended a virtual docent’s tour of the New York City Morgan Library & Museum display of David Hockney’s art work entitled “Drawing for Life.”

- Neighborhoods once bustling with traffic show a noticeable increase in older adults walking for exercise and the sheer enjoyment of being out of doors.

- A recent issue of AdAge (a magazine about advertising) enumerate popular downloads on one’s phones or electronic devices. The application CALM is in the top 10 of desired downloads. LeBron James of basketball fame comments in the ad, “the greats master the body but the greatest master the mind.”

- Self-expression and creativity though the arts has escalated to new heights; the on-line store Etsy and seen a dramatic increase in its online store that encourages shoppers to find things you love by supporting independent sellers – from people of ages.

Whatever your resolution to stay well, it is hopeful that you continue to pay attention to your mind and body when it come to taking care of your well-being.
Caring for a family member, or someone you care for as if they were family, is a huge job. When you’re caring for someone who needs daily, basic assistance, there often isn’t much time for anything else. Whether you’re redirecting someone with memory or other cognitive problems, or giving hands-on care to a frail or sick person, it takes time, effort, patience, and involves a lot of emotion. You need time to think and organize, and time to rest.

The Statewide Respite Care Program offers services to the person who needs care so that you, the caregiver, has a break (“respite”). The services should replace the task or period of time that you would otherwise provide.

This program is designed to give short-term, intermittent relief to the caregiver. It’s not for ongoing, routine care. For example, if you are having surgery or become injured and can’t provide your regular care, the Statewide Respite Care Program may be able to arrange home care, adult day care, or inpatient care at an assisted living or other facility while you recuperate. Maybe you need a break to take a vacation with your family, or a weekend to settle a child into college. Perhaps you are taking a caregiving class for six weeks and need someone to stay with the person you care for during class times.

**ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENT:**

- Age 18 or older with chronic physical or mental disability
- Respite from direct unpaid caregiving needed (Must have a daily caregiver)
- Gross Income: (Single) $2,349 max (Couple) $4,698
- Resources: (Single) $40,000 max (Couple) $60,000

Services:
- home care
- adult day health services
- in-patient care
- campership
- caregiver directed option
- private duty nursing

To apply for the Program in Mercer County call 732-222-9111 ext. 154.
JACC is a program that provides in-home services to seniors at risk of placement in a nursing home. JACC includes an array of services designed to supplement the assistance given by the individual’s caregiver network. Qualified individuals may have the opportunity to hire their own eligible family, friends, or neighbors to provide the care they need.

By Designing service plans uniquely tailored to the individual, JACC works to enhance the individual’s community care options. JACC also strengthens the ability of caregivers to continue in their vital role as primary support providers. JACC participants work together with a care manager to develop a plan of care (PCO) to best meet their needs. The care manager works with the participant to ensure services are delivered as planned.

Based on the results of a clinical assessment, the PCO is developed collaboratively by the participant and his/her care manager. All JACC participants receive care management services.

By providing a uniquely designed pack of supporters of the individual, JACC delays or prevents placement in a nursing home. JACC does have a co-pay that is based on an individual’s income.

Eligibility Requirements:
- Age 60 and older
- Gross Income (Single) $3,881 max (Couple) $5,244
- Resources: (Single) $40,000 max (Couple) $60,000
- Medical eligibility requires need of assistance with at least 3 ADL’s (Activities of Daily Living)

Services:
- care management
- home care
- respite
- environmental accessibility adaptation
- medical equipment & supplies
- chore services
- PERS- (Personal Emergency Response System)
- home delivered meal
- adult day health services
- transportation

To apply for JACC in Mercer County call 732-222-9111 ext. 154
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

My name is Robert Jackson. I’m also an individual with multiple disabilities resulting from Autism Spectrum Disorder (PDD-NOS), Traumatic Brain Injury, Lyme Disease and Developmental Delay. I know what is it like to be a prisoner of the system, but I’m happy to share with you that I’m also an escapee from the system. Yes, I received SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, and Medicare. It has been a bumpy road for me. I started out at a young age working several jobs in fast food restaurants, mall jobs, grocery stores, and working for several temporary staffing agencies. After working in those jobs for some time, it ultimately affected my government benefits.

On May 13, 2003, I received my “Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency” card in the mail from the Social Security Administration. This message was to tell me that I needed to get off of my behind and figure out what I want out of life. From this moment on I knew that it would be in my best interest not to depend on government benefits to take care of me for the rest of my life, despite having several disabilities. In 2008 it was time for me to be re-evaluated for my Social Security benefits. During this time, I just started a new job with the NJ Department of Treasury, Division of Revenue and I feared either losing the job or my benefits. It was determined by Social Security that I’m able to work. I appealed the decision, but was unsuccessful. The good news is that I’ve passed my probation period on the job and became a permanent employee. After working for the NJ Treasury Department for 12 years I’ve decided that I wanted to help people with disabilities maintain a successful life.

Being that I’m a person with a disability and utilized some of the programs that are available to the disability population, such as NJ DVRS, NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities, Community Health Law Project and Disability Rights NJ. Even though I had some ups and downs working with these agencies, I didn’t give up on myself. I currently work for the NJ Department of Human Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities, Employment and Transition to 21 Unit as an Assistant Coordinator.

I’m just letting any parent who has an adult child with a disability, or an individual with a disability know that there are many programs available to help you live a productive life so you don’t have to depend on government benefits or social service programs. Change begins with yourself. You can’t always blame the system for not trying. If you’re not willing to put any effort to better yourself, then the only person you have to blame is you for not trying. I’m happy to let you know that I’m working and taking care of myself without depending on government benefits. I hope this information can help others be more independent.

Kindly Yours, Robert Jackson
virtual
COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS
So, we have made it to 2021 and even though we are not out of the woods, we are perhaps in a more hopeful place. I am happy to report that despite not being able to return to in-person activities yet, we have had a lot of fun and seen many old friends and new faces in the Community Connections Recreation program. If you have read the last several iterations of this recurring article in Forward, you know that PCIL has changed formats for recreation activities, holding one virtual event each week on Friday afternoons. We have always strived to keep a high level of variety in this program, as well as exposing those who participate to skills, activities, and organizations they can engage in independently, and I am proud to say we have maintained that course in our virtual offerings.

Some highlights of the past several months include skill building activities in a variety of forms. From “Coping With Kindness” which taught us the power of kind thoughts, words, and deeds, to help stay the course in difficult times, to fun and informative art lessons on drawing and crafting using items we all have on-hand, we want participants to experience growth and learn ways to build and explore their abilities. The winter months have also seen fantastic organizations like the Mercer County Parks Commission, The Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Mercer County, A-Plus Tutoring, and Key of Awesome Music return to the program with new workshops and presentations, as well as some new players like SPIRIT Club, and Hummingbird Art Studio introducing us to fresh programs and resources.

We also held for the first time, not one but two virtual parties! The first one was for Halloween and featured not only expanded activities, but also a costume contest for participants as well as a costume contest for PCIL staff. The second was a virtual version of our annual PCIL winter holiday party. We tried our best to bring to this virtual gathering the activities best liked in past, in-person parties. These include the ugliest holiday sweater contest, silly holiday games, crafts, and a sing-a-long!

We continue to schedule these weekly activities and strive to bring fun and informative content presented by individuals and organizations that will help build skills, strengthen social and peer bonds, as well as provide enjoyable distractions from current events. We have plenty of activities in store like yoga, drawing, peer forums, nature presentations and we’ll be bringing back old favorites as well as looking for exciting new opportunities.

If you want to learn more about the program, or join our mailing list, please contact us at (609) 581-4500 or reed.thomas@pcil.org.

Thanks everyone, and happy new year!
New Jersey’s Partners in Policymaking is a part of the Boggs Center through Rutgers University. Partners in Policymaking is a leadership development and advocacy education program for people over the age of twenty-one who have disabilities and for those who have family members with disabilities. Each year after the application process only twenty-five people are chosen. The goal of the program is to prepare disability advocates to work toward meaningful change in our state and possibly beyond. Requirements of participants consist of attending all leadership development sessions which have national experts that come, completion of online homework assignments between sessions which are given to better enhance learning and to develop an advocacy action plan to where one wants to start off with. The leadership development sessions are usually held at the Hyatt Hotel in New Brunswick but since the pandemic started all sessions have been virtual through zoom. The guest speakers come to show participants the best practices and important areas for advocacy and policy change. The program of training each year runs from September to the end of April which ends with a graduation. After graduation one would have developed the knowledge and skills needed to advocate for opportunities and supports that promote self-determination, independence and inclusion in all aspects of community life, be members of advisory boards and committees and work alongside policymakers and state agencies. If interested to try to get into Partners, one could apply between May and June of each year; more info and applications can be found at rwjms.rutgers.edu.

Continued on next page.
Partners kind of fell into my lap through word of mouth and once I heard about Partners I was drawn and had to try to get in. There is a lot of change that still needs to happen and I want to help impact change for generations to come and to be a better advocate for myself. I am still in the beginning of my journey but what I’ve noticed so far is that going through this program thus far is opening my eyes to the many layers of injustice than what I know about through my life; the unfairness and discrimination to that I have experienced makes me more passionate to help influence change in any way I can. I have noticed that doing this program is also helping me with my confidence and shows me that I am capable to influence even if it is just by sharing my story. I’m in the process of figuring things out and deciding where I want to go with this among many other things and I look forward to seeing where my future leads. Speaking up for ourselves and for others who can’t speak up for themselves is the way to be. We all deserve to be respected and the narrative around the disability community needs to change and this program is one way that can help us work toward that.

Johanne Mayer

COVID CHANGES

Since March 2020, the Corona Virus has changed the services I received from PCIL. Before the virus, I went to All Star Music in Flemington in person for voice lessons. Now I am receiving voice lessons with someone from All Star over the phone. There have been some challenges doing it over the phone. Instead of the instructor using a regular piano, she is using an electronic piano. Even though it is a challenge, I am still enjoying it. When the virus goes away, I am looking forward to seeing an instructor in person again for voice lessons.

Another service I received before the virus from PCIL was working with an assistant in the community. Since March, I am no longer receiving that service. Instead of working with an assistant, I am doing small things in the community with my parents and one of my friends.

The last thing I used to do was going to Hunterdon Health and Wellness Center in Clinton. Since the virus, I miss going to the gym. It felt great exercising on machines! Instead I am taking walks in the neighborhood with my parents. When the virus goes away, I will look forward to working out in the gym again.
Things I am Grateful For in 2020

Even though 2020 was one of the most difficult years of my lifetime, and the beginning of 2021 is rough, I am still trying to focus on things I am genuinely grateful for.

I recently graduated from Rider University. After graduation, I started a part-time job where I collect data about weather and energy, download important energy data spreadsheet files and help simplify the systems by eliminating certain duplicate files. I am grateful for these experiences because it is cool learning new things and being productive and useful. I hope that I succeed in my part-time job so I can use it as an asset or advantage to build a more solid foundation for my future career.

I am glad to have made friends while at college, including a classmate who is a member of Theta Chi at Rider University. This person comforted and supported me during the unexpected passing of another friend, who tragically gave into struggles with opioid and street-drug use. I am also grateful that this person helped me appreciate one of my hardest classes and see it in a more positive light so I can say that I had some more good classes or fun classes with people who were affiliated with Theta Chi. This inspired me to support Theta Chi and their philanthropies as well as raising awareness to stop the opioid and street drugs crises.

Finally, I am grateful for being able to use Zoom activities to reconnect with family and friends. Sometimes it gets lonely and depressing, so it is reassuring to know that we have technology to be able to reconnect with each other when we are far away whether it is a group exercise, an intervarsity Christian fellowship meeting or even a music activity to inspire us to overcome adversity and celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday. These virtual activities are also helpful in improving my physical and mental health as well as my overall wellbeing.

These are all the things that I am grateful for so far despite the pandemic. I am grateful that I can do things to stay productive and connected with other people. And I am grateful that I have more admirable causes that I am inspired to support. And I hope that 2021 will be much better than 2020. I also look forward to better days when the coronavirus pandemic finally blows over for good.

Richard Ni
On April 10th, 2020 the United States government’s response to the COVID 19 Pandemic included an unprecedented relief package for Americans in need. One part of that relief package is the CARES Relief Fund. CARES stands for Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security. This fund is to provide direct economic relief to the American people. Many organizations received support through this legislation, including some centers for independent living. PCIL is one such center, and we have been committed to the rapid relief of these funds for Mercer and Hunterdon County, and efforts in making rapid response to individuals in crisis due to COVID 19 Pandemic. We have been provided with an opportunity to directly assist those in the community we serve with access to CARES Relief funds. These funds would be awarded to help meet people’s crucial needs related to current COVID 19 Crisis. PCIL can directly assist with items or services which are a necessity and have been disrupted, or made otherwise inaccessible, by the Coronavirus Pandemic. To date we have been able to: provide access to personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, gloves, and sterilization products; facilitate or provide access to needed communications technology; supplement transportation access when public systems were unavailable; assist with unforeseen accessibility needs; and many other forms of assistance that individuals in our community who are living with disabilities have required as a result of the events that have unfolded over the past many months.

We remain committed to applying this funding where it can make a direct impact and using outside-of-the-box problem solving to help the disability community stay strong and weather the storm of this global pandemic. This assistance is available to any person with a disability experiencing a barrier to healthy living which is directly related to the Coronavirus Pandemic. Please understand it cannot be paid directly to the individual, but can be applied in a variety of ways, provided the person’s situation fits the scope of the program. If you, or someone you know fits that description please have them contact us immediately at either our Mercer or Hunterdon offices. We are manning our phones during normal business hours and whomever answers can assist you in further exploring the options.

Mercer County: (609) 581-4500
Hunterdon County (908) 782-1055

Lisa Duran
PCIL IN TRANSITION!

RAMP IS UP AND RUNNING

PCIL is continuing to offer our youth transition program “RAMP” Ready to Achieve Mentoring Program, developed by Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC. RAMP is a high-tech, career-focused mentoring program for youth involved with or at risk of becoming involved with the juvenile justice system, including those with disabilities. The RAMP model offers youth ages 13-17 the opportunity to assess and explore their own career interests and develop a plan and set goals for their transition. They will focus on In-Demand, STEAM career fields and gain workplace soft skills, build resume-writing, interviewing skills, interact with employers, and experience a variety of work settings. This program is infused with a mentor concept which uses a combination of group, peer, and one-on-one mentoring to promote the successful transition of RAMP youth to employment, continued learning opportunities, and independent living. We are recruiting youth now and will offer our weekly sessions and mentor interactions through a virtual platform. Any youth interested please call Mr. Eddie at 609-581-4500 or reach out via email at Edson.Stjuste@pcil.org.

Pre-Employment Services through DVRS

Have some extra time on your hands and want to get a step up on your career plan? If you didn’t know, PCIL accepts individual vouchers from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVR). This means we can work with you to help you identify a career interest, build a resume, work on interviewing skills, learn next-steps to move into a career you dream of and most importantly, understand what employers are looking for. To get us involved, you can reach out to DVRS and request Pre-Employment Services and ask for us. Need help connecting to DVRS? We can assist you there too. Just call us and ask to speak with Renee.
LOOKING FOR MENTORS

We are always looking for caring adults for our mentees. For more information please contact us at 609.581.4500 and ask for Eddie

MENTORS SHOULD BE:
- A willing listener
- A willing listener
- Encouraging and supportive
- Tolerant and respectful of individual differences.
- Patient and flexible

MENTOR RESPONSIBILITIES:
- Take the lead in supporting mentee through an ongoing 1-on-1 relationship
- Serve as a positive role model and friend
- Build the relationship by planning & participating in activities
- Strive for mutual respect
- Build self-esteem and motivation
- Help set goals and work toward accomplishing them
- Make a one-year commitment
- Communicate with mentee(s) weekly
- Attend an initial training session and one additional training session during each year of participation in the program

LOOKING TO PARTNER

Attention business owners in Hunterdon and Mercer County! Are you looking for dedicated and trustworthy people to hire or fill internships this summer? Our Gateways program successfully prepares young adults to hold down summer jobs or internships and we would like to share that success with you. We can help with unpaid internships by providing stipends for students wanting to gain employment experience. Let PCIL help find the perfect worker for you!
What’s one of the biggest hurdles to getting a job? Transportation. PCIL staff know the struggles to not only find a job, but figure out how you’re going to get there and back. Many of our young adults share that not having a driver’s license has been detrimental to their job search. Recently, we have been working on a course that offers the opportunity to review for your written drivers test and better prepare you to take that test at DMV. If you think you have the time to dedicate yourself to hit the books and get your permit, give us a call and we can move you in that direction.

PCIL offers a variety of exceptional services for students who have disabilities. One of these services, Gateways to Success, is offered to high school students between the ages of 16-21 in Mercer and Hunterdon Counties. The program is designed to prepare its participants for competitive integrated employment and/or post-secondary education. This is done by having groups of students meet once a week for 12 weeks in a classroom setting. The sessions are led by an instructor from PCIL who assists the students with identifying their career preferences based on their interests and abilities. A plan of action is then developed which includes the preparation needed to enter that chosen career. Upon finishing the classroom sessions, the students are then assisted in searching for and applying for summer jobs or internships.
BLACK BEAN Brownies!

Initially, I wasn’t interested in Black Bean Brownies. However, a new organic restaurant opened in town and they offered Black Bean Brownies. I tried it and I knew I had to try to make my own. I found a reasonably easy recipe. A family friend is a local beekeeper and I have been using his bee’s honey in hot tea and cooking. The primary reason for the local honey is to help my seasonal allergies. Now, I have a wonderfully healthy yummy brownie.

- Samantha Saat

INGREDIENTS
1 can of black beans
1/4 c cocoa, unsweetened
1/2 c unsalted butter, melted
1/2 TBS vanilla extract
2 TBS instant espresso/coffee
1/8 tsp salt
2 large eggs
1/2 c honey

DIRECTIONS
Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
Line 8x8 pan with parchment or with non-stick spray.
Blend all ingredient in food processor until smooth.
Pour in batter and bake for 43-47 minutes.
Brownies should be firm and not jiggle.
PASP offers consumers choice, flexibility, control and the opportunity to manage their personal care services through the receipt of a cash allowance.

CONTACT US NOW!

Mercer County ADRC
609-989-6661
ADRC@mercercounty.org
640 South Broad St, PO Box 8068, Trenton, NJ 08650-0068

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MAKE MASK WEARING EASIER.

Perfect for caregivers, students, essential workers, educators, and persons living with disabilities

Each set comes with two breakaway mask lanyards for safety and an easy to clean mask storage bag.

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