There was one “silver lining” that shed light on Centers for Independent Living (CILs) during the COVID19 pandemic and of course one of those was Progressive Center for Independent Living (PCIL). The value of the work CILs do in the community really showed itself when supports and services became even more crucial and to a greater depth for individuals with disabilities and their families to keep them safe and healthy.

Community-based CILs being directed and staffed by individuals with disabilities put us in position to be understanding of the needs that became far deeper for our consumers. The number of individuals we assisted greatly increased as more people were made aware of our services and reached out for support, for assistance and advocacy.

What clearly surfaced during the pandemic is the great value the CILs hold to assist individuals

- Continued on next page.
and families with a variety of topics helping to assure their independence in the community while maintaining their health and safety.

With this additional exposure and recognition, CILs were successful getting into the state budget under NJ Department Human Services for the first time! After three years of work, making connections and educating our legislators on the role of CILs, it finally bared fruit! With our work becoming front and center around the state, we finally started to see well-deserved recognition for what we do.

So our “silver lining” was of course having a spotlight on our work that helped us increase our funding stream in order to assist more people. We have great legislative champions who believed in us and supported our work. Our advocacy and capacity-building efforts were certainly highlighted because of all the good work we do on the ground in our communities working with individuals and families with disabilities in a genuine relationship way that naturally breeds independence!

“Reach out to committee members and urge them to pass this bill....”

PCIL has (two) used laptops that we would like to offer to our consumers who are in need. We will offer them on a first-come, first-served basis. Please be aware that these are used laptops, and PCIL will not be responsible for updating or future repairs. If interested, please contact Renee Pfaff at 609-581-4500/renee.pfaff@pcil.org.
There is no need to explain how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted all aspects of our lives and influenced our experiences. After the initial pandemic started in March 2020 and the Special Olympics is held traditionally the first week of June. Sadly, in June 2020, the Special Olympics were cancelled.

To keep spirits up the Special Olympics did start holding some online activities that the athletes and families could participate in. This included game nights and some videos of sporting events. The Special Olympics also started having planning meetings in January of 2021 determining that they were going to hold the Special Olympics for this year. The task then became how to manage the competitions, venues, and participation as COVID-19 was still an issue. It was decided that practices and competitions that were held in person would entail temperature checks, symptom checks, and documenting these on a weekly sheet. They also had procedures in place in the event someone did display or have symptoms of COVID-19. The venues that were selected also had to have no other events going on at the same time. The Special Olympics also limited the spectators as well and where the spectators could watch the competition from. Still the competitors showed up for the events, adhered to the guidelines, and displayed the same dedication and determination they have had in previous years. Each athlete was proud of their accomplishments and were happy to be able to participate.

The summer events are bocce, gymnastics, power lifting, softball, swimming, tennis, and track and field. Each of these events was held at separate venues, but they still required everyone to wear mask, social distance, and they also ensured that they kept to specific schedules so the competition numbers could be within guidelines.

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Special Olympics sent out medical forms and they also had everyone sign a COVID1-19 waiver survey to ensure the health of athletes and spectators.

My firsthand experience was with the tennis competition. Usually, the tennis team would start practicing indoors in January. As COVID 19 made indoor participation impossible, the tennis team had to start with outdoor practices in April. This gave the athletes less than two months of practice time after being used to a year or more of practice before competition. Every week the athletes showed up at Mercer County Park outdoor tennis courts and practiced for an hour and a half every Tuesday. The competition took place at the Princeton Tennis Center, and instead of having all the athletes compete together they broke down the competitions into singles, where athletes compete against each other one on one and unified doubles where a Special Olympics athlete plays with a non-Special Olympics athlete. The matches were broken down by Division and each match was limited to 30 minutes. The matches were also broken up into morning competition and afternoon competition. Despite the limited time each athlete practiced and the change to the structure, each athlete put their all into each match. Many matches went to tie breaks, which in tennis are both participants, winning the same number of games where a final match is played to determine the winner. Interacting with the athletes, I observed that they were so excited to see each other and that they were so happy to participate. They kept their senses of humor and really gave all they could to ensure they put their best foot forward.

My sister-in-law, Chrissy, played in the unified matches with her brother Joe. She played exhibition games, which means her opponents could not be present at the matches, but volunteers played with her so she could participate in the experience fully.

Chrissy’s favorite quote when we ask her about playing Special Olympics tennis is “Tennis is not hard. You just use the racket and hit the ball over the net.”

Chrissy played in the unified matches with her brother Joe. She played exhibition games, which means her opponents could not be present at the matches but volunteers played with her so she could participate in the experience fully. Chrissy and her brother Joe, won the gold medal for unified doubles.

When COVID-19 causes you to become sad or anxious, just remember as these athletes proved nothing can dash our spirits or our hope.

For further information about the Special Olympics, you can go to SONJ.org.
STAY-GO JUDY BAG PRESENTATION

On Friday, June 4th, PCIL strayed from the typical recreation event that afternoon and instead offered a presentation so participating individuals and families could be better prepared for emergencies, disasters and of course a pandemic event.

Al Grupper, a long-time subject matter expert on emergency preparedness joined Scott Elliott, Executive Director of PCIL, also a subject matter expert in this field, to provide an educational, preparedness presentation on either sheltering in place or evacuating your residence if needed. The “Judy” stay-go emergency bag was used as a centerpiece for this interactive demonstration. There were 18 participants who learned about an array of valuable items to keep on hand incase of an emergency. A show and tell of the various items in the bag as well as a smaller version bag triggered an excellent conversation with many questions being asked and answered.

The group was very interactive and seemed to really enjoy the discussion about what to keep on hand in your home or apartment. All participants were very excited to learn that each would receive a new and fully stocked “Judy” Bag for their involvement in this presentation. Additional emergency preparedness items were raffled off during the presentation that further piqued participant interest throughout the time.

This event turned out to be very well received in lieu of our normal recreation type event.

The interaction among all participants included valuable and natural peer support that usually occurs during our virtual events.
Progressive Center is excited to announce that our Community Connections Recreation Program has begun a transition to begin incorporating in-person activities as many people begin to become more comfortable returning to face-to-face events. However, if you still feel more comfortable with the virtual world, we do plan to continue offering our Zoom events every 1st Friday of the month for the time being. We will make our first in-person community appearance during July with a return to the Trenton Thunder Ballpark. In August, PCIL will once again host our annual softball game at the YMCA, Miracle League.

WHAT WE’VE BEEN UP TO
As always, our recent Zoom events offered a wide variety of entertainment and much needed social interactions among those we serve. We had partnered with the Trenton Circus Squad where participants watched a tutorial on juggling! We created beautiful artwork with Ms. Lori from A-Plus and learned how to utilize depth perception in our artwork with artist Ken Wilkie. We took a deep dive into local flora with the Mercer County Park System that educated us about all the local flowers in our area. We continued our education through the NJ State Museum where their archaeologist, Dr. Greg, offered an amazingly informative series on people of the past. We ended the month of May with our good friend Patrice Jetter who showed us a nifty craft activity transforming a t-shirt into a useful bag.

HAVE AN IDEA?
We are always looking for suggestions for future events, either virtual or in-person so if you have ideas, feel free to contact us. For more information about our Community Recreation Program or to sign up for the mailing list, simply contact us at 609-581-4500 or email us at reservations@pcil.org.
Michele Tyler is the Co-Director of NE-PACT, a Senior Parent and Professional Development Staff trainer and the Family Engagement Specialist on the Special Education Volunteer Advocate project at SPAN Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN). She had been with SPAN since 2011. Before joining SPAN, Michele became a trainer for NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness), graduated from Partners in Policy Making, and has been involved in many parent groups in her community helping to ensure meaningful parent involvement.

Michele is a parent of 3 children. Her youngest is diagnosed with autism and her middle child has Attention Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder. They both receive special education services. Michele prides herself in her commitment to parent and professional collaboration. She believes that her biggest achievement is successfully advocating for her youngest son, who is the first child under 21 years of age to receive services through the adult system: The Division of Developmental Disabilities.

Michele believes that as parents our knowledge must extend beyond the law. Positive relationships that we build with other parents in our communities and schools help to ensure successful outcomes for our children.
The 2020 school year was chaotic and out of the norm. Many students participated in virtual learning, some absorbing the knowledge and others struggling to learn virtually. COVID-19 has made the past year difficult for some students who completing their senior year of high school and turning 21. Those who were previously looking forward to their graduating year and moving to Division of Developmental Disabilities services have had to adjust to remote learning and for many, this has been a challenge. To help with this, Governor Murphy had signed into law P.L. 2020 c. 41, a Bridge Year for individuals to be able to have an extra year in high school. The program is an opportunity to relearn topics covered in their senior year of high school.

The Bridge Year Pilot Program is for individuals who anticipated to graduate in 2021 and 2022. This Bridge program allows student who were graduating in 2021 and 2022 to return for another school year. Students eligible for the Bridge Year Pilot Program must have defined goals in their Individual Learning Plan (ILP).

Some students would like to go right into the DDD system and begin their new journey instead. However, it does not necessarily need to be a choice of one or the other. Students can remain in the education system for their Bridget year AND receive DDD services if they are over 21 years old.

There are some caveats to this, however. Any services that a student is receiving or able to receive within the school and education system should only be utilized through the school. Services that are not available through the school system can be utilized through the DDD system, such as Goods and Services and Individual Supports. Goods and Services can entail things such as gym memberships, exercise classes, cooking classes, horseback riding, and art classes. As long as there isn’t overlap or duplication of services, individuals...
can use both systems of care. The regulations also state that; “Regarding Bridge Year’s age requirements described above, the New Jersey Department of Education (Department) reminds districts that students with disabilities who have satisfied their state and local graduation requirements but may need an extra year of services, and will not turn 21 years old before June 30, [2021] may receive services for another year as determined by the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, which includes the student and the student’s parent(s)/guardian(s).”

Another restriction is that an individual can only use a portion of their Supports Program budget while they are still in school. The Supports Program budget is divided into two sections, the Employment and Day Habilitation portion and the Supports portion. When someone is still accessing their educational entitlement, they can only access services that would come out of their Supports portion of the budget until they graduate, and then the entirety of both portions of the budget are available to use for services.

DDD is already a complex system with specific requirements and regulations and adding in this new Bridge Year Program adds to the confusion. NJ DOE states they will be putting out additional guidance on the Bridge Year Program and any questions can be sent to bridge year@doe.nj.gov.

For specifics of this legislature, the full Bridge Year Implementation Guidance can be found here: www.nj.gov/education/COVID19/boardops/docs/NJDOE_BridgeYearGuidance.pdf.
Interning at PCIL through the Gateways to Success Program

Hello, my name is Chris Ramos! I am a student at Hightstown High School. My hobbies are video games, technology, drawing, and hanging out with my friends. I am involved in the Gateways to Success program, which teaches me required skills for independent living and jobs. I am using PCIL as a summer internship, and I am hoping I can learn new skills and gain work experience. I will be assisting staff at PCIL with developing and keeping excel sheet data, collecting student time sheets, scanning and organizing student files, and supporting other PCIL staff.
A quarterly publication written by the Mercer County Office on Aging/Aging & Disability Resource Connection to help support older adults, those living with disabilities, and their caregivers.

ARTICLES BY ADRC

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ADRC  (609) 989-6661
Nutrition  (609) 989-6650
TOLL FREE  877-222-3737
According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), sickness from the heat occurs when your body cannot compensate and properly cool your body; however, heat-related illness and death are preventable.

Follow these protective actions from the CDC to stay cool this summer:

• Stay in an air-conditioned location as much as possible.
• Drink plenty of fluids, even if you do not feel thirsty.
• Take several breaks from the heat, especially midday when the sun is hottest.
• Wear loose, lightweight, light-colored clothing and use sunscreen. Remember that you should reapply sunscreen as indicated on the package and do not use expired sunscreen.
• Take cool showers or baths to cool down.
• Check on friends or neighbors during extremely hot days and have someone do the same for you.
• Never leave children or pets in cars.
• Check the local news for health and safety updates.

Find more information on extreme heat preparedness at www.ready.gov/heat.

If you find yourself in need, please remember that Mercer County has multiple cooling centers where you could go to avoid the
potential dangers of heat exposure. The branches of the Mercer County Library System serve as cooling sites and are open to all residents. Please note all library patrons older than 2 years must wear a face mask while inside and adhere to physical distancing guidelines. Hours vary, so please call ahead or check the Mercer County Library System’s website, www.mcl.org, before visiting.

The branch locations are:

- Ewing Branch, 61 Scotch Rd, Ewing 609-882-3130
- East Windsor Branch, 138 Hickory Corner Rd, East Windsor 609-448-1330
- Hightstown Memorial Branch, 114 Franklin St, Hightstown 609-448-1474
- Hollowbrook Branch, 320 Hollowbrook Dr, Ewing 609-883-5914
- Hopewell Branch, 245 Pennington-Titusville Rd, Pennington 609-737-2610
- Lawrence Headquarters Branch, 2751 Brunswick Pike, Lawrence 609-882-9246
- Robbinsville Branch, 42 Allentown-Robbinsville Rd, Robbinsville 609-259-2150
- Twin Rivers Branch, 276 Abbington Dr, East Windsor 609-443-1880
- West Windsor Branch, 333 North Post Rd, Princeton Junction 609-799-0462

The municipal senior centers also serve as cooling centers; however, not all are open as they continue to deal with concerns brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the hours of operation for those that are open vary greatly. It is of utmost importance that you call ahead before visiting. The open centers are:

- Hollowbrook Community Center, 320 Hollowbrook Dr, Ewing 609-883-1199
- Ewing Senior and Community Center, 999 Lower Ferry Rd, Ewing 609-883-1776
- Hamilton Township Senior Center, 409 Cypress Ln, Hamilton 609-890-3686
- Jennye W. Stubblefield Senior Center, 301 Prospect St, Trenton 609-989-3463
- Hopewell Valley Senior Center, 395 Reading St, Pennington 609-737-3855
- Samuel Naples Senior Center, 611 Chestnut Ave, Trenton 609-989-3462
- Robbinsville Township Senior Center, 1117 Rt 130, Robbinsville 609-259-1567

For assistance coping with the heat or to contact your local cooling site, call the Mercer County Office on Aging/Aging & Disability Resource Connection at 609-989-6661, or toll-free at 877-222-3737, or by email: ADRC@mercercounty.org.
My name is David Loughran, and I am 23 years old. I have Duchenne muscular dystrophy and have been enrolled in the Mercer County Personal Assistance Services Program (PASP) since 2016. Thanks to the personal care assistance that PASP provides me, I was able to attend college and live independently on campus.

The effects of COVID-19 have been felt across the world. The pandemic cut my senior year at Princeton University short and made it difficult to find a job. Fortunately, I was offered a freelance writing job with a company called Bold.org in March. Bold.org is a philanthropic company dedicated to reducing the student loan crisis, pairing scholarship donors with deserving applicants.

The experience I gained at Bold.org has led me to a job as an External Affairs Intern for Princeton Athletics. I will perform many duties across all departments, including marketing, communications, and multimedia. I have always wanted to work in the sports industry, so I am very excited to begin!

Living with a disability can be extremely difficult. A lot of tasks are hard for me, and I need a lot of help. However, I haven’t let it stop me from pursuing my goals. If people want to underestimate me, I am more than happy to prove those people wrong!

I am grateful for PASP and its services, which allow me to maintain my independence as I begin this new chapter of my life.
PASP PROGRAM: EXPLAINED

PASP is a personal care assistance program that provides routine, non-medical personal care assistance to adults age 18 to 70 with permanent physical disabilities who are employed, preparing for employment, attending school, or involved in community volunteer work and who are able to self-direct their services. The goal is to support individuals so that they may remain active participants in their communities. PASP offers participants choice, flexibility, control, and the opportunity to manage their personal care services.

PASP is accepting new participants in Mercer County. To learn more about how the program works and to be screened for eligibility, please contact Reed Thomas at the Mercer County Office on Aging/Aging & Disability Resource Connection by calling 609-989-6459 or emailing rthomas@mercercounty.org.
On July 30, 1965, Medicare, a health insurance program for older Americans and Americans living with disabilities, was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in the Truman Library in Independence, Mo. It provided hospital and medical insurance for citizens ages 65 or older. Almost a year later on July 1, 1966, Medicare became available. Former President Harry S. Truman was the first person who enrolled in Medicare; this is significant because President Truman was the first president who supported national health insurance. After Medicare became available, 19 million people enrolled.

Medicare was expanded upon in 1972, at which time it also became available to Americans younger than 65 with certain disabilities and all Americans with permanent kidney disease who needed either dialysis or a transplant. It was further expanded upon in December 2003, when President George W. Bush signed the Medicare Modernization Act into law; this added outpatient prescription benefits to the program. Additionally, Medicare, unlike Medicaid, is not bound to lower incomes, increasing the range of the people assisted. In 2020, Medicare helped 61 million people, 1 million of whom lived in New Jersey. Enrollment numbers are projected to grow, with an expected enrollment of 93.8 million people in 2060.

Medicare is a crucial part of so many people’s health and well-being, but it is not always the easiest program to navigate. Despite helping

JULY IS MEDICARE’S BIRTHDAY

By Raaha Kumaresan and Reed Thomas
Americans for more than 50 years, many still have questions about the program. Do I have to have it? What do I do about prescription coverage? Do I have to buy a part D plan? What is an advantage plan and how does it work? What is a Medi-gap plan? Can I afford the monthly premium and still meet my living expenses? What can I do if I can’t afford it? What happens if I need services that are not covered? Can I have Medicare and Medicaid at the same time?

For questions like these and others that may come up while trying to best utilize Medicare coverage, the Mercer County Office on Aging/Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) can help. Our staff is able to provide options counseling so you understand what the outcomes of your choices will be and you are equipped to make the decisions that are right for your situation. We are also able to help you understand the interaction between Medicare and Medicaid, help you know if you are eligible for one or both programs, and assist with applying for them. We can provide eligibility screenings for programs to help save on the monthly premium, access services like in-home assistance, connect to meal delivery, and others.

For eligibility questions or assistance with applications, contact the Mercer County Office on Aging/Aging & Disability Resource Connection by calling 609-989-6661 or emailing ADRC@mercercounty.org.

If you have questions or are facing important decisions regarding your Medicare options, please contact Cathy Forbes by calling 609-273-0588 or emailing cforbes@chsofnj.org. For information for Spanish speakers, contact Cristaly Marmol at 609-306-6767 or cmarmol@chsofnj.org.
Established in 2001 as an addition to the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, the Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program provides resources in the form of fresh, nutritious, unprepared foods like fruits, vegetables, and herbs to low-income older adults. With foods provided from authorized farmers, the program not only helps increase the nutritional health of our communities, but also increases the demand for locally grown produce and boosts the income of farmers who produce and sell locally grown products.

Eligible older adults will receive vouchers for use at participating vendors at area farmers markets. To qualify for this program, you must be able to verify that:

- You are 60 years of age or older
- You live in Mercer County
- Your income does not exceed $23,828 per year or $1,986 a month if you are a single person
- Your income does not exceed $32,227 per year or $2,686 a month if you are a couple

Those who are eligible will receive five $6 vouchers for a total of $30 to spend. If your produce cost is more than $6, you may pay the difference in cash or with food stamps. In addition, be sure to use at minimum the exact amount listed on the checks; you will not be able to receive cash change. The Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program will accept applications until Sept. 30, 2021, and the vouchers will be redeemable until Nov. 30, 2021, although waiting to get or use them means you might miss out on the freshest and tastiest fruit of the summer!

Vouchers will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis. When you receive your vouchers, you also will get a listing of participating markets and vendors. If you are taking a trip to a market, make sure to call ahead, as market days may change due to weather and produce availability.

If you, a family member, or friend could benefit from this program, please call the Mercer County ADRC at 609-989-6661, or send us an email at ADRC@mercercounty.org for more information or to apply.
The Mercer County Office on Aging/Aging & Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) embraces concerns of older adults, those living with disabilities, and their caregivers and respectfully offers viable options for long-term supports and services.

A part of the ADRC, the Mercer County Nutrition Project for Older Adults offers lunches to community residents 60 years old or older or anyone married to someone 60 or older.

Call the Mercer County ADRC at 609-989-6661, or toll-free at 877-222-3737 and Brianna Richardson or Denise Knighton will gladly help connect you to an experienced staff member for assistance.

County of Mercer
ADRC Office
adrc@mercercounty.org
609-989-6661
877-222-3737

Mercer County Nutrition Project
609-989-6650

www.mercercounty.org/departments/human-services/aging-disability-resource-connection
The Mercer County Department of Human Services, in conjunction with the Mercer County Board of Social Services, has re-opened the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) to help landlords and tenants in Mercer County in need of financial assistance with unpaid rent or utility bills and future rent or utility bills due to the impact of COVID-19, homelessness, or housing instability. The Mercer County Board of Social Services will accept applications starting August 1 until funds are expended. Visit: https://bit.ly/ERAPApplyII to complete the application. For questions call 609-389-3575.

Progressive Center for Independent Living also has funds through the CARES Act to assist those affected by COVID-19. If you experienced a hardship directly linked by COVID, call us to see if you are eligible for funding to go toward emergency food, supplies, personal protection equipment, technology, medical supplies not available during COVID, or limited rental assistance. You can reach us at 609-581-4500.