



# NYSILC NEWS BRIEFS

The New York State Independent Living Council (NYSILC) is a champion of systemic change promoting opportunities and full participation in all aspects of society for people with disabilities.

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## The Importance of Community

By TK Small, Attorney & Disability Rights Advocate

This week I attended three separate events which caused me to slow down and acknowledge the importance of community. Throughout the week of October 16-22, I participated in the Occupy Wall Street demonstration, the Concepts of Independence Inc. Annual Gala and ending the week on Saturday, I went to a memorial service for a friend named Michael Imperiale, who recently passed away. One might think that there is not much connection between these events, but they would be mistaken. Within the disability community practically every event tends to illustrate our similar spirit and identity. According to Miriam Webster, "Community" is defined as:

*1: a unified body of individuals: as a state, commonwealth b: the people with common interests living in a particular area; broadly; the area itself<the problems of a*



*large community>c: an interacting population of various kinds of individuals (as species in a common location d: a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society<a community of retired persons>e: a group linked by a common policy f: a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests<the international community>g: a body of persons of common and especially professional interests scattered through a larger society<the academic community> 2: society at large 3: a joint ownership or participation<community of goods>b: common character: likeness<community of interests>c: social activity: fellowship d: a social state or condition.*

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Almost all aspects of the definition above were present in all of these events. Like many people in America that are frustrated with the economy, government, and a whole host of corporate malfeasance, people with disabilities are no different. So, when the burgeoning Occupy Wall Street movement started to take hold, many were intrigued and wanted to get involved, myself included. Finally, people are coming together in opposition to the Tea Party/Ayn Rand activists. Naturally, I wanted to know more. Soon I discovered that other disabled people were interested too. In NYS, a group of activists with disabilities have given themselves on Facebook the name "Krips Occupy Wall Street" and have pledged to meet at Zuccotti Park every Sunday. While I probably won't be able to go every weekend, I was there last week. People with disabilities have historically been discriminated against and marginalized in practically every aspect of society. Whether it is segregated education, a healthcare system that promotes nursing homes and the institutional bias, or the disproportionate rate of unemployment and poverty within our community, if there is one group that should be demanding our rights and accountability, it is the disability community. To be part of that effort was fantastic!

By way of background information for those that don't know, Concepts of Independence Inc. is a not-for-profit organization that administers the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program here in NYC. Concepts was the first such organization of its kind in the country to allow people with disabilities to hire, train, manage and control the care that an individual receives in the home. After nearly 30 years, Concepts has become the model across the country.

Under the Consumer Directed model, people with disabilities have the freedom to live independently and notably, in these tight budgetary times, this type of care is less expensive. Under this care delivery model, Personal Assistants are allowed to perform tasks which ordinarily must be completed by trained medical professionals, which is where the savings are generated. For most of the people that were in attendance at the Concepts Gala, we share a common experience of fighting for our independence and living independently successfully. While our disabilities are all very different, it is our desire to live freely that binds us together.

The memorial for Michael Imperiale was held in the community room where Disabled In Action meets, which is more than appropriate, given that Michael was a long-standing member. Disabled In Action (cofounded by Judy Heumann) was one of the earliest disability rights groups and Michael was involved from the beginning. Michael had a zest for life that few can match, but everyone should emulate. Michael had a definite connection in a large segment of the NYC disability community. Although Michael wasn't a leader in the traditional sense, he was undeniably a strong disability rights activist. He attended practically every demonstration that I can remember over the past 20 years and at public meetings, Michael will be remembered for his unique ability to speak directly and get to the most important point. I will always remember his comment at a NYS Department of Health meeting, "Don't you understand? This is about choice!" Michael's statement is exactly what people with disabilities are fighting for all across this country and it is part of our common consciousness. The foregoing description of the disability community is

something that should be celebrated and not viewed, as by some non-disabled people, that our lives are difficult and not worth much. I love the sense of commonality that I experience with other people with disabilities. For instance, rolling down a sidewalk and making eye contact with another chair user, there is usually a slight nod, or smile of acknowledgment and recognition. In a sense, we have all rolled in each other's path. For me, being connected with my fellow disabled brothers and sisters is important. The disabled community has shaped the person I have become and I am lucky to be part of this vibrant community. **Reprinted with permission-**  
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**Link: <http://www.tksmall.com>**



## **Peter Yarrow's "Magic" Wows Mental Health Stakeholders**

*By Joe Adler*

It seemed like a long shot, but Susan Murante, a board member of New York's Mental Health Association (MHANYS) made it happen. Could Peter Yarrow-the Peter in Peter, Paul and Mary, the famed folk-singing trio and political activists, (1961-1970, 1978-2009) be enticed to come to Albany to speak about mental health? The first task was to track down this worldwide activist and performer, now 74, who is as likely to be in China or Israel as his New York residence. After "many calls," the board member reached Yarrow and persuaded him that his message of hope for persons experiencing depression would resonate at MHANYS' annual conference. The statewide organization had previously brought celebrities from the world of sports, and other walks of life, who have spoken in public about their recovery from emotional illness.

Yarrow's mother, sister and other relatives also experienced depression. After some milder periods of clinical depression as a young adult, Yarrow reports that he suffered from depression, very, very serious depression, for over 10 years: "Mental illness, or bipolar depression in my case, is so painful that it's like the analogue of physical pain, but it's not physical. It's emotional and mental." (Interview with Tom Keyser of Albany Times Union, October 21, 2011) The folksinger recalled that sometimes he'd arrive at a concert and just fall into a friend's arms. Finally, with the help of a psychopharmacologist and his therapist,

Yarrow was placed on the optimum medication regimen for his bi-polar disorder.

Yarrow's rapport with his audience was truly exceptional. His message of hope was inspirational, while neither minimizing the debilitating effects of major depression nor downplaying the life changes necessary for recovery. This man understands that for many mental health recovery consumers, recovery does not mean the absence of symptoms but their reduction to the point where they interfere much less with daily life activities.

The performer's current project, global in scope, is to use music to bring together peoples currently at odds. "Music is the only medium which unites all people." Interspersing his inspirational messages with all-time favorite hits such as "Blowing in the Wind" and "Puff the Magic Dragon," as well as newer compositions, Yarrow spoke and sang for two hours, and answered questions. For the finale, he invited the audience to join him on the stage, and many of us responded. All in all, it was one of those memorable evenings that you hope will never end.

*The core mission of MHANYS is to provide education, support and advocacy to help enhance the recovery of individuals with psychiatric disabilities. For more information about programming, please go to <http://www.mhanys.org/index.php> or call (518) 427-8676.*



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