

Heightened Independence & Progress Center for Independent Living



Annual Report October 1, 2020 - September 30, 2021

**Empowering People with Disabilities to Achieve Independent Living through
Outreach, Advocacy and Education**

Heightened Independence & Progress

2020-2021 Annual Report

November 2021

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**Deceased*

Greetings,

It's hard to believe that another year has passed and we're still living with some of the restrictions imposed by COVID-19. Our conversations are dominated with talk of vaccines, variants, surges, mandates and supply chains while we grapple with new concepts like Zoom meetings and remote access. We're adapting to what we're calling the "new normal" - getting used to plexiglass screens, hand sanitizers in all sizes and a healthy supply of masks at the ready.

As you will see in the pages of our second Annual Report living under CDC guidelines, **hip** was able to continue our contingency plans and the staff was flexible in creating ways to best serve our consumers without missing a day.

With the extension of The CARES Act we were able to maintain our programs and offer equipment to enable people to remain in their homes comfortably. We were also able to provide limited rental and utility assistance, expand people's access to communications and provide much-needed food assistance to a wide variety of consumers. Perhaps the most important service that we provided was to connect with people who were otherwise isolated through our frequent consumer wellness calls.

I have been impressed by the team spirit shown by the staff and their willingness to find creative solutions to assist people with disabilities to remain independent. I also want to express my appreciation to the members of the Board of Trustees - your commitment to the **hip** mission has made my role as President a worthwhile experience.

Sincerely,

Brian Fitzgibbons

Brian Fitzgibbons, MPA, CRC
President/CEO

We are pleased to present the accomplishments of our Centers for Independent Living during FY 2021. Many of the initiatives have been administered by both the Bergen and Hudson CILs, while others are specific to one individual site. It has been our privilege to meet the independent living needs of the disability community for over four decades.

*“I can always rely on the **hip** staff to help me and my family when we are going through a hard time, they always find a way and go the extra mile.” - Hudson Consumer*

“The yoga classes have really made a difference in my life and relieved so much stress and anxiety. I look forward to each week and get so excited for these classes. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.” - Bergen Consumer

*“Everyone at **hip** was extremely helpful. Everything was explained well, and I understood what I needed to do. Very professional and great service. Thank you!” - Bergen Consumer*

hip Highlights...

- The Bergen and Hudson CILs provided information and services to 938 consumers, family members, friends and professionals. Although the vast majority resided in Bergen and Hudson Counties, individuals from all areas of New Jersey benefited as well.
- The *COVID-19 Community Response Program* continued with funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020. The program addressed food insecurities, provided Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and emergency rental and utilities assistance, and purchased medical and non-medical devices and technology to assist consumers to access or reconnect with services and supports they needed to remain safely in their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. These funds provided rental and utilities assistance to several families who had lost income due to COVID-19 job closings. Once the counties took over with rental assistance, **hip** assisted as a referral source. **hip** partnered with many service providers to identify consumers who needed iPads, Chromebooks, laptops and other technology devices which were then purchased. This enabled these consumers to participate in virtual classes and Zoom activities and remain connected to the community. Multiple hours of supplemental personal care attendant services were provided for Hudson County. Over \$9,000 in ShopRite gift cards were given to consumers who were experiencing food insecurity. Consumers also received masks and gloves as well as hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies.
- Over 150 consumers received assistance from **hip** to get their COVID-19 vaccine. **hip** staff arranged transportation to and from vaccine appointments, booked appointments with pharmacies and vaccine sites, and followed up to check on health post-vaccine.

“I never thought I could cook like this, thank you for giving me the courage to try something new!” - Hudson Consumer

“Thank you for all the activities we did! And for delivering all the groceries. You have made me feel alive again!” - Hudson Consumer

*“The **hip** staff has been informative and helpful. Thank you for always helping me apply for programs and being patient. Also, thank you to Trish and the church who are so kind and wonderful.” - Hudson Consumer*

- The Bergen and Hudson CILs partnered with the NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities to provide Support Coordination services. Support Coordinators worked with 128 consumers to assist them in accessing community-based supports and services to enhance their independent living. Efforts were directed in such areas as identifying appropriate programs and providers, facilitating socialization skills and building life experiences with the ultimate goal of securing employment.
- Rehabilitation Technology funding enabled 122 individuals to receive disability-related equipment. Home modifications that increased safety and access in home environments were funded for 17 individuals.
- The Adjustment to Vision Loss Project Peer Support Groups gained many new members once again this year. In-person groups have not yet met monthly in Fort Lee, North Arlington, Washington Township, Jersey City and Secaucus and are still meeting remotely via Zoom or conference line several times each month. **hip** has continued to host two telephone support groups with participants from all regions of the state and has expanded to a biweekly basis. One group is for young adults under 30 and the other is for individuals over the age of 30.
- AVL has been able to provide a weekly yoga and meditation session with a volunteer, Thien, a trained yoga instructor. Every Thursday about 11 consumers have been getting together for over a year now to participate in these yoga classes via Zoom. AVL has also been able to provide interactive recreation activities via Zoom. All consumers who participated either had their items for each activity dropped off or delivered to their homes. Some of the activities included cooking lessons, a chocolate dipping and decorating party, gardening, and sing-along and murder mystery parties. AVL additionally had the opportunity to provide many Hudson and Bergen consumers with donations of brand-new clothing and accessories throughout the year, which came from the town of Secaucus and its mayor.

“Trisha, you are truly an angel sent from heaven. To know people like you really care is a godsend. You are so appreciated. Without you this past year I would be so down and out.”- Hudson Consumer

“Shoshana helped me tremendously. I couldn’t have taken care of this without her.”- Bergen Consumer

“Thank you for setting up the murder mystery Zoom party! It let me leave reality for 2 hours and play the character of a millionaire!”- Hudson Consumer

- Care Management programs in both CILs provided assessments and linkages to financial benefits and community-based services such as Food Stamps, PAAD, Lifeline, USF/LIHEAP, Meals on Wheels, Medicaid and many other resources which enabled 144 individuals to live independently in the community.
- **hip** also provided case management services through the statewide Traumatic Brain Injury Fund. This Fund, which receives its revenue from a \$.50 surcharge on motor vehicle registrations, purchased services and supports to enable individuals who have been impacted by a traumatic brain injury to live independently in the community. Our **hip** TBI consumers were able to receive cognitive rehabilitative therapy, legal services, in-home assistance with household organization and financial management, medical transport, vision therapy and special lenses through the TBI Care Management program.
- The Youth Transition Case Management Program in Hudson County provided individuals ages 16 through 24 both short-term and long-term services in order to remain in the community, increase their independence and successfully access adult services. This year 46 individuals and their families received services. The program provided information, resources, advocacy and support to enable young adults with disabilities to optimize control over their lives and increase their knowledge and skills.
- The Hispanic Outreach Project provided all independent living skills to the Spanish-speaking community through the efforts of bilingual staff. Linking consumers to financial benefits such as medical/prescription coverage and providing assistance in preparing for re-certification for housing and/or Food Stamps were frequently requested services.
- After eligibility interviews were suspended from mid-March 2020 until August 2021, **hip** resumed Access Link interviews via phone during this fiscal year. This NJ Transit program was established to provide public transportation to people with disabilities who are unable to use the fixed route bus services.

*“I was so thrilled when I opened up the box and saw that **hip** had sent me a yoga mat for the yoga program! Thanks a million!”- Bergen Consumer*

“Victoria was such a help – I guess I wanted it to go on forever. I grew to believe she was my friend and would help until I received the last of rental assistance. She was calm and always there for me. As I said, I wish it could have gone on even longer. Victoria is such a wonderful person and helped me enormously.” – Bergen Consumer

*“My life will certainly be enhanced by receiving Medicaid. I appreciate all the assistance **hip** gave me.” – Bergen Consumer*

- Braille by Multimedia Transcription Service continued to convert elementary, high school and college-level textbooks and exams into braille format, giving countless students across the country the ability to be on the same “page” as their sighted peers. This year continued to be a new experience, but with most schools back in person, Braille by MTS worked hard from both home and the office to provide the braille books requested by schools. Everyone at MTS is excited to once again be working on community projects such as theater programs and museum signs now that places are opening back up to visitors.
- The *Eileen Goff Legacy Fund*, funded exclusively through private donations, provides financial assistance to individuals and families with compelling needs when one-time support can make a difference in their lives and no other funding is available. This year, the *Eileen Goff Legacy Fund* provided funding for assistance towards food, assistance with the payment of household expenses, the purchase of a stairlift and accessible transportation.
- *Our New Journey*, also funded privately, offered assistance and encouragement to families faced with the onset of illness or disability by providing caregiver peer-to-peer support, individual guidance directed toward the understanding of personal needs and limited financial support for direct care assistance.
- During this year, the **hip** website was improved and added new functionalities that make it more professional, aesthetically pleasing, and user friendly. Now visitors can read it in different languages and hear the text thanks to the “text to speech” function, among other new upgrades. The website has been able to communicate a lot of essential and helpful information clearly and effectively for consumers in a timely manner. The website designer is continuing to implement website accessibility best practices to further improve usability for all people regardless of their disability. The main benefits are allowing manual font size adjustment and color contrast, keyboard-only navigation, alt text or descriptions for non-text content, and more.

*“My friends at **hip** are missed and oh how I treasure you all. Thank you so much for inquiring as to my health and heart. I miss not having meetings, a gathering of friends all sharing with each other their problems as well as successes.*

*The **hip** staff is always going above and beyond making sure we are safe. Thank you for that.”- Bergen Consumer*

*“**hip**’s care managers advocated on my behalf, and I won my appeal for MLTSS! Thank you!”- Bergen Consumer*

*“**hip** was very helpful in submitting applications and finding answers. Their way of navigating the process made me feel very safe.”- Bergen Consumer*

- The COVID-19 pandemic put a pause on the partnership that **hip** had formed with the bergenPAC in Englewood. Through their Arts Access Program, **hip** members had received numerous tickets to wonderful performances over the years. We are happy to announce that as of October 2021 the bergenPAC is welcoming audiences again and we are excited to re-start this program.
- Thanksgiving Dinner was purchased for 58 individuals who otherwise would not have had any celebration since the COVID-19 pandemic cancelled community Thanksgiving gatherings. Funding for the meals was provided by the *Eileen Goff Legacy Fund*.
- The 2020 holiday season was brightened for many consumers due to **hip**’s affiliation with the generous parishioners of St. Peter the Apostle Church in River Edge. These wonderful people enabled **hip** to distribute hundreds of gifts and thousands of dollars in gift cards to individuals and families who otherwise would not have had a holiday celebration.
- A grant program funded by the Polio Network of New Jersey continued to be available to assist individuals throughout the state who have been affected by post-polio syndrome. Financial assistance can be provided for home modifications that enhance accessibility as well as the purchase of mobility aids.
- A technology consultant provided one-on-one instruction to a number of consumers on how to use their iPhones, iPads, tablets and other technology to stay connected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“My wife and I are so thankful for everything you are doing for us. You have been a tremendous help. We could not have survived this year without all of you. God Bless You!”- Bergen Consumer

*“Thank you for all the support and patience you all provide. **hip** staff has made me feel like family especially during these tough times. I can always count on them to make life easier and less stressful”- Hudson Consumer*

*“I am so very grateful for **hip**’s services. Everything was handled very professionally and you got the problem solved. Thank you.”- Bergen Consumer*

- Community Outreach – In a typical year all staff are called upon to represent the CIL in both counties at fairs, events and exhibits concerning senior services, care management and student transition. Since most in-person events were suspended, the staff participated in remote access meetings where appropriate. The President/CEO sits on The Bergen County Workforce Development Board (Executive and Abilities Committees), The Bergen County Human Services Advisory Council (Adult Services Committee), The Bergen County Division of Disabilities Advisory Committee, The Bergen County Elder Abuse Community Coordinated Response Team, and the Hackensack Area Chamber of Commerce. The Executive Director of Hudson **hip** sits on the Hudson County Human Services Advisory Council, the Project Search Committee and the Hudson County Office of Disability Services Advisory Committee.
- To address the social isolation consumers were experiencing as they spent so much time at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, **hip** launched a virtual recreation program called **hip Humpday Home Happenings**. Meeting via Zoom on a weekly basis, participants of all ages renewed old friendships and made new ones as they played games and completed arts and crafts projects. Activities included sing-a-longs, Bingo (with the lucky winners receiving a \$10 gift card to the store of their choice), learning magic tricks and an indoor scavenger hunt. Each quarter participants were mailed an Activity Box containing all of the supplies needed for the weekly activities which included coloring Mandela designs, painting suncatchers and light-up wooden vases, decorating cookies and making a decoupage bird. The activity box also included a sombrero which participants donned for a virtual Cinco de Mayo party, where they made chicken tacos and garnished them with salsa, queso, and guacamole from Fiesta Kits that were no-contact delivered to their homes.

“Nicole was an excellent care manager. She was always available and as helpful as she could be. She handled everything professionally and with heart.”- Bergen Consumer

*“I enjoy doing Zoom meetings with **hip**. I find it rewarding to see everyone have fun, especially during these challenging times. It keeps my mind busy. Thank you, **hip**”- Hudson Consumer*

“I finally feel like a whole person again. Thank you so much for caring and always reaching out.”- Bergen Consumer

- FEMA has long advised that we keep a “go bag” in the case of an emergency that would cause us to evacuate. The bag would include essential items that would allow you to have a supply of medication, water, a flashlight and some items to keep you warm. One of the realities of the pandemic was the “stay put” orders that recommended that we remain at home to avoid risking infection. Based on that order we thought about what people would need to remain comfortable and safe at home so we created our Essential Bags. Using CARES ACT funds, we purchased nylon drawstring bags and filled them with a packet of 48 blank notecards, a pen, a book of 20 forever stamps, a pack of light bulbs, toothpaste and toothbrush, liquid soap, sanitizer and tissues. The contents of the bags were not only useful, but they helped to avoid extra trips to the store. The bags also included valuable information about the importance of the vaccine programs and guidance on how to make arrangements to get them. In collaboration with our colleagues at Meals on Wheels-North Jersey, and Jewish Family Services we were able to distribute 160 bags to people who receive the meals. We also distributed them through The Bergen County Volunteers CHEER program and to the Residence at St. Peter’s in River Edge.
- As some of the COVID-19 restrictions were relaxed, consumers and staff members were encouraged to visit spots in the community and take a picture. The goal was to select enough scenic photos to be presented in a 2021 calendar. The project was met with great enthusiasm and the calendar was a big success.
- Despite the pandemic putting a hold on many activities, fundraising still was a focus this past year. The Hunkerdown Hoedown, held in March, was a wonderful alternative to **hip**’s annual Dinner Dance Gala. The stay-at-home event was enjoyed by all, as well as being a fundraising success. The annual Calendar Raffle was held in July, August and September and was **hip**’s most successful ever. Winners were pulled each week in the Bergen office and celebrated on the website and Facebook page. The raffle was an excellent way to close out the fiscal year.

***hip* STAFF**

Brian Fitzgibbons MPA, CRC – President/CEO

Trish Carney – Vice President/CFO

BERGEN CENTRAL OFFICE

Joanna Benthall – AVL Peer Support
Group Coordinator

Nicole Clark – Care Manager

Tamara Clark-Gill – Care Manager

Trisha Ebel – Vision Loss Specialist

Barbara Farrell – AVL Assistant

Linda Horvath – Office Assistant

Jayne Jacobs – MTS Project
Coordinator

John Lampert-Hopkins – Multimedia
Transcription Service

Pedro Martin – Webmaster

Victoria Robbins – Care Manager

Kathy Rohr – Multimedia Transcription
Service

Marie Sawyer – AVL Peer Support Group
Coordinator

Shoshana Stubin – Care Management
Supervisor

Stephanie Thomas – Office Assistant

Maria Valentin – Rehabilitation Technology

HUDSON COUNTY SATELLITE OFFICE

Marily Gonzalez – Executive Director

Natalie Alave – Case Manager

Angela Arboleda – Case Management Supervisor

Celia Chavez – Case Manager

Van Dautruche – Support Coordination Supervisor

Mariana Martinez – Independent Living Specialist

Jennyfer Paniagua – Youth Services Case Manager

Alejandro Paredes – Case Manager

Jennifer Preciado - Case Manager

Maria Smith – Independent Living Services Assistant

hip CONSULTANTS

Gillian Addison - Multimedia Transcription Service
Barbara Conklin – Graphic Design and Production*
Ronald A Dahl, Jr. – Graphic Design and Production
Adam Krass – Assistive Technology
Laurie Keller – Clinical Supervisor
Frank Lampert-Hopkins – Multimedia Transcription Service
James Fee Langendoen – Technology Consultant
Francesca Lewis – Multimedia Transcription Service
Thelma Smith – Multimedia Transcription Service
Thien Vu – Adjustment to Vision Loss

*Deceased

LIFE MEMBERS

Paul Aronsohn	Patricia & Dave Ebel	Anna P. Navatta
Annie Been	Lottie Esteban	Marianne Pigoncelli
Darrell Bethea	Betty Fetzer	Beverly & Dick Ryan
Trish Carney	Brian Fitzgibbons	Michael Smith
Kay Chase	Richard M. Hodgman	Jeffrey St. Germain
Lillian Ciufu	Joan F. Klug	John Stanik
Barbara B. Comerford, Esq.	John Koch	Carol Viceconte
Marie & Mike Cook	Chili Li	Anne Burton Walsh
Jim & Jean Csaposs	Gloria Lieberstein	Philip & Linda Webster Cennerazzo
Carol Dass	Roy Lippin	Janice Willett
Barbara Dublin	Ann Melone	Richard S. Wolfman
J. Robert Duffy	Dr. Frances Meyer	Anthony & Mary Yorio

BENEFACTORS

Elaine Appelof & Jerry Saunders
Bergenfield Lions Club
Estate of Heather Broad
Michael & Marie Cook
Lottie Esteban & Family
Ms. Genevieve Farrell & Mr. Robbie Fisk
First Presbyterian Church of Hackensack
Fund for the New Jersey Blind
Andrew & Linda Goff

Hackensack Lions Club
Kaplen Foundation
Eve & Mort Levinson
Anna P. Navatta
River Edge Lions Club
Kathy Rohr
John Stanik
St. Peter the Apostle Church, River Edge

FUNDING SOURCES

Bergen County Department of Human Services
Bergen County Division of Senior Services
Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020
Hudson County Department of Health and Human Services
New Jersey Department of Human Services Traumatic Brain Injury Fund
New Jersey Division of Developmental Disabilities
New Jersey Transit ACCESS LINK Project
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – Administration for Community Living

In addition to the funding sources noted above, *hip* also has contracts with many school districts across the country for the production of braille textbooks.

2020-2021 INCOME

Government Contracts	\$ 883,217
Membership	\$ 4,130
Contributions	\$ 9,038
Foundations	\$ 3,500
Program Fees	\$ 123
MTS Program Fees	\$ 143,565
Fundraising	\$ 10,111
Special Agency Projects	\$ 370,875
Miscellaneous Income	\$ 1,000
Client Assistance	\$ 200,186
Total Income	\$1,625,745

2020-2021 EXPENSES

Personnel	\$ 990,268
Consultants	\$ 44,292
Supplies	\$ 25,123
Program Costs	\$ 20,361
Transportation	\$ 7,654
Occupancy	\$ 175,732
Training	\$ 853
Miscellaneous Expenses	\$ 7,633
Client Assistance	\$ 186,376
Total Expenses	\$ 1,458,292

hip also has a Diversified Portfolio of Invested Assets

