

Testimonial Starts Here:

I represent more than 3000 people with disabilities and family members that my agency, BRIDGES has served over the last year and a half. People with varying disabilities; young and old and many of whom travel independently in the community (Rockland County, NY). Our small yet lively county has fallen short of meeting the transportation needs of thousands of our community members and has gained a reputation of being unreliable, late, un-trained, uncaring, and woefully unaware of the needs of the disabled community. At BRIDGES, the agency I oversee as CEO, we live by the motto that if "you think of people with disabilities first (as in for design, infrastructure, engineering, architecture, events, etc) everyone benefits"!

Our local train stations have been evaluated by staff members of BRIDGES who are ADA certified and who themselves are people with disabilities. Various stations failed several ADA expectations and even beyond that, the ability to provide a safe, clean and universally accessible environment. Examples include, tread or tactile on the platform for people with low vision or blindness to indicate they are at the edge of the platform; audible signs and notifications; accessible train cabins; properly placed signage for those with deaf and hard of hearing disabilities; accessible platforms, bathrooms and ticket purchasing stations for anyone with a disability including those who use a wheelchair. Train stations like those in Suffern, Pearl River and Nanuet NY are just some of the stations our community has and continues to express grievances, wondering if these locations would ever be improved for them.

Our bus system has presented many challenges and, outside of technological updates that are needed, the single most important action needed is training to drivers and dispatch workers. Making them aware of the needs of the community, those with disabilities and understanding how to use the technology they have to ensure people with disabilities are able to adequately access the bus system. In addition, training their drivers and dispatch workers on how to address circumstances when technology fails, with a level of customer service that ensures the rider that they've been heard and that their interest comes first is extremely important to improving behavior that has been reported by our community members as intolerable, disgusting and unmotivated.

Improving our transportation system for people with disabilities benefits everyone! It's as simple as understanding that when you build a ramp anywhere, instead of building steps, anyone can access that location; parents with strollers, wheelchair users, seniors and anyone with an unseen disability or chronic medical condition. Using the transportation system is a community member's right and a tool that allows them to be independent without barriers. The transportation system should not, in and of itself be a barrier to people with disabilities, yet right now, in Rockland County, the transportation system is one of the biggest barriers to our community members ability to achieve independence. Transportation in Rockland County NY, both train and bus, must be improved! We must see to it that this system is improved and that the lives of those with disabilities including our seniors (who according to stats make up about 40,000 New Yorkers in Rockland County) are enhanced because we have improved and increased access throughout our region.

End of Testimonial.....

Please send me meeting details to log on to. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Carlos Martinez, LMSW
CEO/Executive Director



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