

Living Without Limits

Winter 2025 OCEAN STATE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

WE ASKED, AND YOU ANSWERED

In January, OSCIL hosted Olmstead Listening Sessions to gather input on the present and future of Independent Living in our state. We were relying on the participation of our diverse disability community to provide real perspectives and experiences, ensuring that Rhode Island's first Olmstead plan, now in development, would respond to the actual conditions and needs of our communities. You did not disappoint. Over the course of four sessions, we engaged with people from a wide range of backgrounds for discussions on four main topics:

Goals for an Ideal Independent Life

To make a proper plan, it is important to define what we are working towards: what is your vision of an ideal independent life? Participants emphasized the importance of communication access and access to other accommodations. They want fulfilling and gainful employment, accessible affordable housing, and financial stability. Most also called for access to quality, responsive healthcare. All identified a fundamental need for consideration, understanding, and respect in daily living.

Existing Services & Resources

Rhode Island may be drafting its very first Olmstead plan, but our disability services and community resources are not starting from square one. In our sessions, the com-



munity highlighted many services and resources that are already available and helping people to achieve their goals for independent living. These included resources like: Uber and Lyft, MTM, RIPTA and paratransit (Ride); Section 8 and subsidized housing; LTSS personal care supports and many other programs available through DHS; private and state-run interpreter agencies, video remote interpreting, and automated caption technology; Community Health Centers; and the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS).

While these are available to the public now, participants generally noted that all fail to fully meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Barriers to Independent Living

To find appropriate solutions, we first have to identify the obstacles in our paths. Through discussion about their own personal experiences, participants identified several barriers that hindered them from living their best lives. Common challenges included the extreme lack of available housing units, especially accessible ones, and long waits for housing vouchers. Lack of communication access and poor accountability were particularly problematic for the Deaf community. Other issues including insufficient funding for support services, lack of awareness about available resources, and societal attitudes that perpetuate stigma and discrimination. Transportation issues and bureaucratic hurdles were also frequently mentioned. **Continued on page 2.**

WE ASKED, AND YOU ANSWERED CONTINUED:

Needed Services, Programs, and Changes

No one person has all the answers, but working together, participants were able to suggest a range of services, programs, and changes that would address the barriers they identified. The recommendations included: increasing funding for disability services; expanding affordable housing options; enhancing public transportation accessibility and permanently eliminating the three-quarter mile service corridor for paratransit; and improving/increasing public awareness and education initiatives on disability issues. Broadly, there was a call for more inclusive policies and practices within work places and community spaces.

Our Olmstead Listening Sessions provided a constructive forum for open dialogue and produced valuable insights that will be instrumental in shaping the upcoming Olmstead Plan. OSCIL has shared all of this with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and we continue to serve on the Olmstead Advisory Committee to ensure that the voices of you, our consumers, remains present.

Thank you to all who participated and shared their experiences and ideas. You have helped to shape future initiatives and policies to better serve Rhode Islanders with disabilities. Together, we can continue working towards a community where everyone has the opportunity to live fulfilling, independent lives.



RIPTA Shows Its Commitment to Disability Competency

In November and December, the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) partnered with OSCIL to facilitate a series of Disability Sensitivity Workshops. These workshops aimed to enhance employees' understanding of the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities. The sessions focused on improving communication, acknowledging challenges, and fostering empathy by addressing misconceptions and stereotypes.

Facilitators Allyson and Richard led interactive sessions where employees gained practical skills and had the opportunity to ask questions and share real-life experiences. Attendees reflected on challenges they had faced while assisting passengers and explored how these experiences related to their own lives. This collaborative approach equipped RIPTA staff with strategies to improve customer service and foster a welcoming environment for all passengers, reinforcing RIPTA's ongoing commitment to ensuring accessible transportation for everyone.

OSCIL hopes to extend this partnership and offer our workshop to future cohorts as our RIPTA drivers and staff. We will keep you updated on any developments.

Do you know of a business or organization that would benefit from expanding its awareness of disability? Find out more about our Disability Sensitivity Workshops at [oscil.org/sensitivity](https://www.oscil.org/sensitivity) or call 401-738-1013 for more information.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEW BOARD PRESIDENT

Christina is a Supported Employment Coordinator at Skills for Rhode Island's Future, helping individuals with disabilities prepare for employment. She serves on several boards, including OSCIL, chairs the Rhode Island Statewide Independent Living Council, and is a motivational speaker sharing her experiences with a physical disability.



There's a New Face at OSCIL!

Styles is a passionate LGBTQ+ Artist and Designer with a BFA in Graphic Design from the University of Massachusetts. His work is inspired by a love for vibrant storytelling, body positivity, cartoons like Steven Universe, anime, and the fast-paced world of competitive gaming. He can often be found as a vendor at local Pride events, sharing his art with the community. Oh, and if there's a ukulele around, he just might play a tune!



UPCOMING EVENTS

oscil.org/events



February Lunch and Learn

On January 29, learn about Americans with Disabilities Act regulations pertaining to service animals. The 211 Van will also be present to assist with a variety of resource needs.

Disability Peer Support Group

On March 4, join our supportive community where we share experiences, provide encouragement, and foster growth together!

Deaf Independent Living Classes

On February 12, learn about the Rhode Island cyber attack, what happened, and how to protect your information and identity. voting equipment called the ExpressVote.

March Lunch and Learn

Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) will provide valuable insights and updates regarding both fixed route and paratransit services.

Assistive Technology Awareness Expo

On March 20, this free event showcases assistive technology, offering hands-on activities and tools for accessibility.



Stay up-to-date on OSCIL news and events. Subscribe to our email list today!



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Visit **OSCIL.org**
for more information!



OSCIL's Membership Drive is Underway

This is your chance to connect with a supportive community and support our mission to promote independence and inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

Why Join?

Community Connection: Be part of a network that values and supports independence.

Exclusive Benefits: Enjoy voting rights and regular updates on our programs.

Support Our Mission: We welcome donations of any amount to help sustain and grow OSCIL's programs and services. Every contribution, big or small, makes a meaningful difference.



Ready to Join?

To Join visit oscil.org/members, call 401-738-1013, or stop in to an OSCIL office to join today. We look forward to starting the year together!



We would like to give a special thanks to the ççç for sponsoring a series of 8 disability sensitivity workshops.

To learn more about sponsoring a workshop, visit oscil.org/sensitivity or call 401-738-1013.