

Explore, Play, Belong: Accessible Summer Recreation

1 message

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Explore, Play, Belong: Accessible Summer Recreation



Whether your child or family member is a toddler navigating the playground for the first time or an adult running their first marathon, **recreation can enrich everyone.**

Recreational activities can promote physical health, mental well-being, participation in the community, social connections, skill-building, empowerment, and last, but not least, fun!

In this issue, you'll meet **Jordan**, who is now pursuing his love of gymnastics with support from a Starbridge Fiscal Intermediary (FI) Specialist who used her creativity and insight to solve a difficult challenge.

Are there activities your loved one with a disability would enjoy doing if barriers were removed? Then you'll want to meet **Anita O'Brien**, Founder and Executive Director of Rochester Accessible Adventures (RAA). A valued community partner, RAA facilitates the inclusion of people with disabilities into

community recreation and tourism by working for systemic change.

July is Disability Pride Month. This year marks the 36th Anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the landmark federal law that protects people with disabilities from discrimination. Read on for ideas on how to celebrate..

Jordan Discovers Gymnastics through Starbridge Self-Direction Services

Jordan's mom, Cloria, came to Starbridge when he was just three years old looking for Self-Direction options.

Self-Direction means that a person with a disability chooses the supports and services that work best for them. The person, along with their circle of support, develops a person-centered plan, including a self-directed budget to pay for the staff and other supports and services needed at home and in the community.

Cloria was paired with Starbridge Fiscal Intermediary (FI) services, which manages the administrative, financial, and payroll responsibilities for self-directed plans. It was there she expressed that Jordan "didn't know where his body was in space." Jordan needed a lot of sensory input and was always on the go; he needed something to help give his body a safe outlet to get his energy out.

FI Supervisor April Dixon suggested signing Jordan up for gymnastics. Gymnastics provides intense sensory input which helps participants organize their bodies in space.

Cloria was hesitant at first, but she was willing to have Jordan step out of his comfort zone and try new things.

Jordan, now nine years old, is competing at Level 5 gymnastics and takes lessons four days a week.

Cloria credits her son's success to Starbridge's knowledge, expertise, and trusted supports she receives: "I love how Starbridge gives Jordan access to opportunities that I may have never thought of, being his parent! We operate as a team with Starbridge and that opens us up to a variety of different options that we can try, and different perspectives!"

With his self-directed budget, Jordan is able to be part of community programs and really show his strengths. Jordan's days are now busy with things he loves, such as the YMCA, trampoline parks, and of course, gymnastics.

This story first appeared in a Starbridge Facebook post. To see Jordan in action, visit our Facebook page and scroll down to April 9, 2026.



Working for Community Transformation: Rochester Accessible Adventures (RAA)

Anita O'Brien, Founder and Executive Director of **Rochester Accessible Adventures**, shares her vision of how collaboration and working for systemic change can influence the everyday lives of people with and without disabilities. Anita pens her perspective here.

RAA: How It All Began

After more than 30 years working in therapeutic recreation and disability rights, I kept seeing the same pattern: people with disabilities didn't have the same kind of access to recreation and vacation venues as people without disabilities.

I founded Rochester Accessible Adventures in 2015 with a vision of changing how recreation businesses offer their programs so that people with and without disabilities can participate whenever their doors are open for business.

Leisure is a right – and it is where friendships form, health improves, and wellness is achieved.



Partnerships at the Core of Inclusive Programming

RAA is primarily a capacity-building and connecting organization. We form Inclusion Partnerships with community entities — parks, recreation departments, tour guides, libraries, nonprofits, state organizations — to transform how they operate so they can deliver inclusive programming as part of their everyday operations. We then connect people with disabilities to those partners through our **DirectConnect Resource Guide**.

Overcoming Barriers

We all probably think of physical barriers first, such as stairs with no ramps or playgrounds with wood chips and no inclusive play elements. But roughly 80% of what we actually help businesses with is something less visible: how they create a welcoming environment at every phase of program planning. Essential elements of our training and consultation include communication processes, sensory experiences, and emotional support — all of them equally important. Also, as a community, we must address transportation to ensure equitable access to these spaces, we need to develop easier access

to information about what's actually available, and, always, we encourage people to examine attitudinal barriers that are grounded in “no” rather than finding the “yes.”

Addressing Diverse Needs with a Functional Ability Approach

One of the principles our Inclusion Partners learn is that of Functional Ability. When you take a Functional Ability approach to service delivery, you are planning your programs with the expectation that anyone may join in. Each Inclusion Partner works with our team to look at their specific activity, environment, and audience, and we help them think through sensory considerations, mobility and adaptive equipment, communication options, and program design that supports a wide range of participants. Person-centered planning is at the core.

Inclusion Partners Need Support, Not Just Training

Most partners come to us wanting to be more inclusive but unsure where to start. The reality is that many businesses were not planned from the beginning with inclusion in mind. Often, it's the systems that are in place that continue to perpetuate the barriers.

So, businesses need support, not just training. That's why RAA's model does so much more than training alone. We contract with a business for at least a year. We take a deep dive with them to assess the core of their operations and work through a strategic inclusion plan to come out on the other side with processes, policies, and programming that are re-developed through a lens of inclusion.

A New Inclusion Partnership Promotes Canal Corridor Activity

Our most recent contract with New York Power Authority (NYPA) and the NYS Canal Corporation has us working in new locations all across the (Erie) Canal Corridor, so now there are opportunities from Buffalo to Schuylerville! Day trips! Weekend destinations! Ready, set, go!



Celebrating Disability Pride Month

July is Disability Pride Month - a time to honor the achievements of people with disabilities while advocating for rights and fighting stigma. Disability Pride Month reminds us that disability is a natural part of human diversity and a valuable part of a vibrant, equitable society.

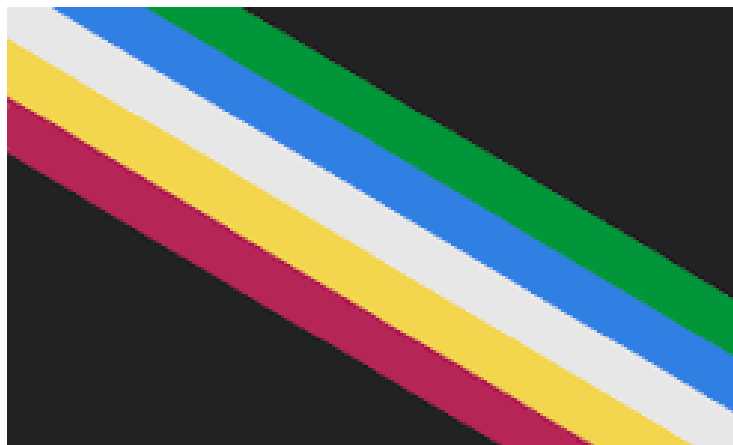
This year also marks the 36th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). How will you celebrate? Here are some ideas:

Educate & Advocate: Learn about disability rights and engage in advocacy to remove barriers.

Support & Elevate: Amplify disabled voices, support businesses run by people with disabilities, and share content created by them.

Attend Events: Participate in local, virtual, or regional events to show pride. Join in Starbridge's Summer Kick Off on July 24th!

Signage & Social Media: Use social media to celebrate or use the official Disability Pride flag to show support.



Free Summer Recreation



A recent Diverse Abilities Dialogues* meeting featured local panelists who highlighted free accessible opportunities available throughout greater Rochester and surrounding areas.

Here is a sampling:

- Visit your Monroe County Library System local branch, and borrow an **Empire Pass**, which allows you free admission to hundreds of NYS Parks located in the Allegany, Central, Finger Lakes, Genesee, and Niagara regions.
- WXXI invites families to visit **PBS KIDS** to find free kids' game apps, podcasts, and video apps your kids will enjoy at home or on the go! Want WXXI's Early Learning team to attend your family-focused community event with a PBS KIDS resource or activity table? Please send your request to CRager@wxxi.org.
- Rochester Accessible Adventures welcomes you to free inclusive recreation through **On the Canals** providers! Enjoy kayaking, birding, nature exploration, guided excursions, boat tours, canal museums, city tours, art workshops, cycling, and more!

• Challenger Miracle Field of Greater Rochester offers year-round sports opportunities for kids (ages 5 and up) and adults with disabilities. Their **Karpus Family Playground** offers full accessibility and sensory integration, making it a truly inclusive, ADA-approved play space.

• **Gigi's Playhouse** in Rochester offers direct educational, therapeutic and career building programs to kids and adults with Down syndrome, their families, and the community.

**Diverse Abilities Dialogues is a collaboration between Webster Public Library, Parents Helping Parents Coalition of Monroe County, and AutismUp.*

A Word of Hope



“To me, hope isn’t loud - it’s quiet strength - showing up, staying present, and believing that something good is unfolding.”

- Joyce Steel, Starbridge Director of Family Advocacy

“The quill represents trusting that the next lines will be something beautiful and the willingness to believe the story isn’t over yet. It symbolizes the possibility that we are still writing what comes next and the gentle act of continuing.”

Joyce recently retired from Starbridge, effective June 26. Joyce, thank you for your leadership and vision in guiding Bridges for the past 11 years and The Bridge for more than 25 years before that. Your dedication to people with disabilities, their families, and the Rochester community made these publications a trusted resource for many readers over the years.

Introducing Hardcopy Version of Bridges!



We're excited to share that we are introducing a new, quarterly, paper version of *Bridges*! This new hardcopy version will provide you with a deeper dive into topics you care about as well as an expanded listing of webinars, workshops, and events hosted by our community partners.

Do you prefer a digital reading experience? We will have the same issue in digital form posted on our website.

Would you like to receive a paper copy in your mailbox? Do you know someone who would benefit from receiving a paper version? Email mschaertel@starbridgeinc.org with your name and address to sign up.

Are you an agency or local business who is looking to collaborate to show your inclusive events? Email marketing@starbridgeinc.org to team up with us!

Upcoming Events and Workshops

Starbridge Events

Please click on program title link for further information.

July

- **Tie Dye and Family Swim**, July 11, 11:00am-1:00pm, YMCA, Olean NY 14760. Registration is required. To register or for questions, contact Kari Cayton at kcayton@starbridge.org or (585) 259-4576.
- **Starbridge Summer Kick Off!** July 24, 3:00-7:00pm. Autism Nature Trail at Letchworth State Park.

August

- **Red Wings: Picnic & Family Night**, August 12, 5:30-11:00pm, ESL Ballpark at One Morrie Silver Way, Rochester, NY 14608. For further information, contact Jean at (585) 224-7248.
- **Enjoy the Autism Nature Trail and Circus Tricks**, August 15, 12:00pm-3:00pm, Trailside Lodge, Letchworth State Park. Registration is required. To register or for questions, contact Kari Cayton at kcayton@starbridge.org or (585) 259-4576.
- **Developing Your Child's Portfolio webinar**, August 19, 6:00-7:00pm. Registration is required.

September

- **Family Fun & Empowerment at Play Zone**, September 16, 4:30-6:00pm, Play Zone, 575 Spittler Lane, Limestone, NY 14753. Registration is required.

Community Events

Please click on program title link for further information.

July

- **Sibling Support Circle**, 5:30-7:00pm, July 7, Aug. 4, Sept. 1 (first Tuesday of every month), **Parents Helping Parents Coalition of Monroe County**, Webster Recreation Center, 1350 Chiyoda Drive, Webster, NY 14580, Room 302. For further information, email parentshelpingparentsmonroe@gmail.com.
- **Traveling with Your Child/Adult with Special Needs webinar**, July 8, 10:00-11:45am, Parent to Parent of New York State, [Register here](#).

- **Every Tree Summer Community Connections**, July 13 - August 7, 1:00-6:00pm, Perinton Community Church, 636 High Street Ext., Fairport, NY 14450. (Formerly Camp Puzzle Peace). [Register here](#)
- **Curious Creators: Build, Tinker, Imagine**, July 13 - July 17, 9:30am-12:30pm daily, **Blue Heron Collective**, 86 S. Union St., Spencerport, NY 14559. Ages 8-13. [Register here](#).
- **2026 Disability Pride Festival**, July 24, 2:00-7:00pm, Buffalo RiverWorks, 359 Ganson St., Buffalo, NY 14203.

August

- **Portland Avenue Community Festival**, August 1, 12:00pm-3:00pm, David F. Gantt R-Center, 700 North Street, Rochester, NY 14605 – Outside. Contact Terry Sinopoli, terry@arlenescostumes.com, for further information.
- **College and Transition Fair for People with Developmental Disabilities**, August 8, 10:00am-12:00pm., Webster Public Library, 980 Ridge Road, Webster, NY 14580. Registration is required.
- **ADK (Adirondack) Family Camp | Every Tree - Social Skills Programs and Resources**, August 17-20, (Formerly Camp Puzzle Peace). [Register here](#).

Coming in the Fall 2026 issue:

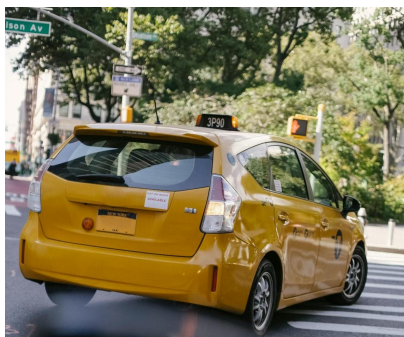
Back to School and Employment for People with Disabilities

Share your thoughts and experiences with us! **Email us at marketing@starbridgeinc.org**

Follow Starbridge on Social Media for stories, resources, and ways to get involved.



Go Monroe - Get Where You Need to Be



School meetings, community & recreational events, even just going out as a family for fun...Go Monroe can help!

For Eligibility Requirements, please click on [Go Monroe \(English version\)](#) or [Go Monroe \(Spanish version\)](#)

Contact us today to learn more or to apply! Contact Jessy May at (585) 224-7250 or jmay@starbridgeinc.org.



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