



Seeing beyond disability.

# Self Advocates Newsletter

“Don’t talk about it be about it”

[www.yai.org](http://www.yai.org)

*Editor’s Note: Inspired by Black History Month, many authors decided to focus their pieces on important African-American figures. Happy reading!*

## Harriet Tubman vs. Andrew Jackson

by Ismael Nunez

If one looks at the dollar bills of this country, you will notice that from the 1 dollar bill to 50 dollar bill there’s no people of color and no women either.

This past April, the US Treasury Department announced that abolitionist heroine and feminist Harriet Tubman will be replacing Andrew Jackson on the \$20 bill. When this was announced, it was a major victory for many, not just for African Americans, but for women and people with disabilities all over the world.

In an article written by Jennifer Wright for Harper’s Bazaar on Sept 12, 2017, she made some great points as to why Jackson’s face should be removed.

“For one thing, Andrew Jackson hated paper money.” He also had a dislike for Native Americans.

“In 1838 and 1839, as part of Andrew Jackson's Indian removal policy, the Cherokee nation was forced to give up its lands east of the Mississippi River and to migrate to an area in present-day Oklahoma. The Cherokee people called this journey the "Trail of Tears.”

They were not allowed time to gather their belongings, and as they left, their homes were looted. They began the march known as the Trail of



*Photograph of Harriet Tubman statue in Harlem (photo taken by author).*

## Upcoming Events

**February 22**

Self Advocates Meeting

**March 1**

March is National Disabilities Month

**March 29**

Self Advocates Meeting

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Tears, in which 4,000 Cherokee people died of cold, hunger, and disease on their way to the western lands.”

Jackson also believed that the United States should only have gold and silver coins as currency. He even passed a law dictating that people buying government land should pay for it in gold and silver pieces. He waged a tireless battle against the Second Bank of the United States, at one point claiming, “The bank is trying to kill me, but I will kill it!” He ultimately triumphed, which experts believe led to the recession that began in 1837.”

Harriet Tubman, on the other hand, was way different. She is perhaps the most well known of all the Underground Railroad "conductors." During a ten-year span, she made 19 trips into the South and escorted over 300 slaves to freedom. And, as she once proudly pointed out to Frederick Douglass, in all of her journeys she never lost a single passenger. It’s been reported, “She returned to slave-holding states many times to help other slaves escape. She led them safely to the northern free states and to Canada. It was very dangerous to be a runaway slave.”

During the Civil War she worked for the Union Army as nurse, cook, and spy. She recruited former slaves to hunt for Confederate troops. In an article by Becky Little which appeared in National Geographic Magazine, she wrote, “In 1863, Harriet Tubman led soldiers with Colonel James Montgomery to raid rice plantations along the Combahee River in South Carolina. They set fire to buildings, destroyed bridges, and freed many of the slaves on the plantations.”

After the war Tubman became an advocate for women, senior citizens, and people with disabilities. Her home in upstate in Auburn, New York is a landmark.

It’s true both of these two individuals had disabilities: Tubman had epilepsy, and Jackson suffered from emotional and physical maladies.

Tubman, hands down, deserves to be on the \$20 bill: A victory for all women and people with disabilities. Next up – a national holiday!

## Chat with Car’Melo: Meet YAI Staff Connie Senior

*by Car’Melo Grau-Puig*

On January 3, 2018 I had the privilege and opportunity to interview a YAI icon who has been working here for the last twenty years. She discussed everything from internet safety to the do’s and don’ts during sex. Ladies and gentlemen, I’m talking about Connie Senior, who is part of the YAI Learning & Talent Development Department. And also she happens to be a LMSW. So let’s hear what Connie has to say in this no-holds-barred interview...



**How did you first hear about YAI?**

I heard about YAI from a professor while I was in college. I didn't know that he was also on the Board of Directors. He told me that he thought that with my passion he thought I would "be a good fit"

**What is your major role at YAI?**

In my department, we work as a team, we support each other on various projects. My major role here in the training department is to: Provide skills training to all staff from all departments; access what training needs there are and create the training or curriculum if we don't already have it. Provide trainings to equip DSPs with how to support people with IDD with specific needs e.g. seniors, people with dementia/Alzheimer, autism, profound disabilities, dual diagnosis, end-of-life care, sexuality. Oversee the social-sexual education & training for the agency and chair the Sexuality Rights & Advocacy Committee. Provide training for the people we support as needed in various topics. Coordinate and oversee the Social Work CE program Teach DSPs effective teaching and other skills necessary to fulfill requirements of the OPWDD core competencies. I work in the Article 16 Clinic as a Mental Health Clinician Coordinate the You & I Dating and Networking Program Represent the agency as a training expert (conferences, contracts, consultations). Department liaison for the Queens region

**What kind of sex education example would you give someone?**

Sexuality education covers so many things! It can cover things like; how to ask someone on a date, types of sexual acts, what acts are legal/illegal, how to masturbate, where to get accurate information on sex, what are sex toys & where to get them; these are just a few things. There are too many to cover in this one interview!

**With today's technology for people with cognitive disabilities, what skills do individuals need in order to stay up to date?**

Definitely safety on the internet and social media. Dishonest people are doing very clever things to steal identity, physically hurt people and rob them of their money. Technology itself can be very helpful and so if people with cognitive disabilities can learn to use it for things like setting reminders for appointments, checking bank balance, having a schedule, looking for and exploring new events/opportunities, getting information, planning events or maintaining relationships then this would be great!

**Could you describe your favorite conference, course, or presentation that you've given on sex education?**

Oh wow! There have been so many! One of my many favorites is a group I did with the mixed recreation group. We went to see Fifty Shades Darker and another romance movie (I don't remember the name), then we met and had a "no holds barred session" It was phenomenal! Everyone who had a question, any social-sexual question, could write it down anonymously and place it in a basket. I promised to answer them all. It was awesome! As the session went on, more people began writing questions. It was great! I was challenged and I was excited to be able to answer questions that people probably wanted to ask for a long time, but didn't know who to ask or where to ask it!

**In your 20 years at YAI what has inspired you to continue your legacy in doing these trainings for the staff and individuals?**

When I see staff take the techniques, apply them and then share with me how it helped them do their jobs better or help the person they were supporting; when staff get that "AHA" moment in a training; when I train/mentor staff and they grow within the agency; when I encourage staff to continue with their education (especially when it's social work...lol); when someone I support through psychotherapy or a group, use what

they learned to make a positive change in their lives. I realize that I am blessed to positively impact people's lives on a daily basis and I don't take it for granted.

**Do you find your experience, as a team member of the Learning and Talent Development, rewarding?**

Absolutely! I work with an awesome team of talented people. We have strengths in different areas that complement each other. I can truly say that when there is a project we all get together and create the awesome trainings, curricula and systems that YAI, NYC and the world (in some cases) have come to love.

**What do you want to see happening for other trainings?**

"Application is the evidence of learning." As we work on staffing I would like to see more staff interested in how to support the social-sexual needs of people with cognitive disabilities. Many "behaviors" have underlying issues of repressed sexual expression. Also as we present more program specific trainings, staff will implement in daily work. "Practice makes permanence"

**What does the future hold for the trainings in sex education?**

For people with cognitive disabilities- continued specific education (no holds barred), resources, and access to technology to explore interests, support groups to address orientation, gender, kink & other sexuality issues. This is all to equip the person with a cognitive disability to make person-centered, self-directed informed decisions about their sexual preferences, practices and experiences.

-For staff- continued training to effectively meet the needs of the people who they support namely doing consent assessments; helping them to identify & actively work on social-sexual goals; giving support without including their views/morals or values; teaching the people they support to develop their own values; how to access information & services in the community (social-sexual nature) and how to understand and support others in safely exploring and expressing their sexuality.

**Do you have anything else you want to share?**

It is just an honor to be interviewed for the Self Advocates Newsletter.. Wow! I am humbly honored.

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**DJ AI!**

*by Allan Fraser*

I did DJ at City Line Residence in Brooklyn for James' birthday. I had fun. I did good. The people were dancing and I played a lot of different music. I played a little salsa, a little Jamaican music, James Brown, and Bruno Mars, and I played "The Last Dance" as the last song. I was happy. I got paid \$20. The people liked me playing music and they want me to come again.



## Before there was Ray Charles & Stevie Wonder there was “Blind Tom”

by Car’Melo Grau-Puig

Thomas “Blind Tom” Wiggins (05/25/1849 – 06/14/1908) was an African – American musical prodigy, who was born blind. He played the piano and he had numerous original compositions and had a successful career in performing and touring in the United States and Europe. Born to enslaved parents in Harris County, Georgia during the 19th century. He was one of the best-known American performing pianist. It was discovered after he passed away in 1908 before autism was described he is now regarded as an autistic savant. Long before musicians like Ray Charles, Stevie Wonder, George Shearing Blind Tom had earned his place by becoming the 1st African American pianist to be invited and perform at the White House for President James Buchanan in 1860.

He learned a reported 7,000 pieces of music, including hymns, popular songs, waltzes, and classical repertoire during his time. For several years he performed publicly when he began his career at age three, but in spite of being blind he was able to communicate with his hands by playing the piano. Although he remained unsung he was among those musicians to grace the music, and that blindness didn’t stop him from performing in the United States.

At the age of 5 (in 1854) he wrote his 1st composition “The Rain Storm” and was able to memorize pieces in a flash. In 1861 his magnificent composition “The Battle of Manassas” beautifully fits in with the other great music from the Civil War era. There were many strikes against him like: his race, blindness but he was, most likely, autistic savant. Sadly, he was unable to take care of himself, couldn’t communicate his own wants and needs and often in the 3rd person. In fact, he wasn’t aware, and nobody knew, that he was African-American. When Blind Tom Wiggins died in 1908 he was penniless. He has been called the last legal slave in America, but he was never really a free man. No original recordings of Blind Tom appear to exist, but his sheet music is available. There was only a small number of musicians to have recorded his original songs. However, this late lost musical genius deserves to be recognized, respected and to be honored in the Black History Month as a person who defied the odds by playing the piano and performing all over the world.

### A quote by Blind Tom about his talent:

“I am astounded. I cannot account for it, no one can. No one understands it!”



### Tom Wiggins compositions were:

- The Oliver Gallop (1860)
- The Battle of Manassas (1862)
- Rain Storm (1865)
- March Timpani (1880)
- Reve Charmant (1881)
- Wellenklinge: Voices of the Waves (1882)
- Sewing Song (1889)
- Water in the Moonlight (1892)

## My Experience in Theater Group

*by Robert Cardona*

For the past 4 months I have been attending a theater group in Park Slope, Brooklyn. It has been like group therapy where each person can act out their emotions in handling everyday situations related to family, work, friendships, etc. During the course of these 4 months I have made new friends as well as learned how to cope better with these everyday situations through drama therapy.

I want to send a message to all of the advocates at YAI about the benefit of acting out situations in drama therapy. Drama therapy may help you to express your feelings as well as to achieve your goals.

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## Why DREAMers Are So Important to the U.S.

*by Michael Howard*

From my research, people from the DACA program have been helping the economy. They're here to go to school, work, and do what they've got to do. DACA immigrants don't just go to school or work here, they also serve in the military. It was so sad when I was watching the View and the youngest Garcia boy was crying, "I don't want to see them get deported." Immigrants have built this country from generation after generation ever since 1776. I just hope the government will work together and come up with a clean DACA bill so these DREAMers can stay here. They're the ones who built this country and they're welcome here. If a good bill passes, I hope more people from those countries will be welcome to come here so the economy can keep going the way it is now. DREAMers love this country more than their own home, that's why they're here, they want to be here. I pray more people will be able to come here documented.



## How I Won My Apartment Case in Court

*by Robert Cardona*

For the last year and a half I have fought for my rights with my apartment building management. I have been fighting to be able to stay in my 1-bedroom apartment in Flatbush Brooklyn, where I have lived for 15 years.

Job Path, the other agency that helps me, joined me in my fight.

The property owner wanted to evict me by not renewing my lease. They did not want to allow my lease to also be in Job Path's name. I felt that they were discriminating against me, as a person with a disability.

With the help of Job Path and the lawyer they got to help with my case, I won in court. Not only will I be able to remain in my apartment for the next 5 years but the new lease will be in my own name. I will not need Job Path to also be on my lease.

I want to say to other people with developmental disabilities that choose to live in a residential IRA like my own, live your dream and do not be afraid to fight for your rights!

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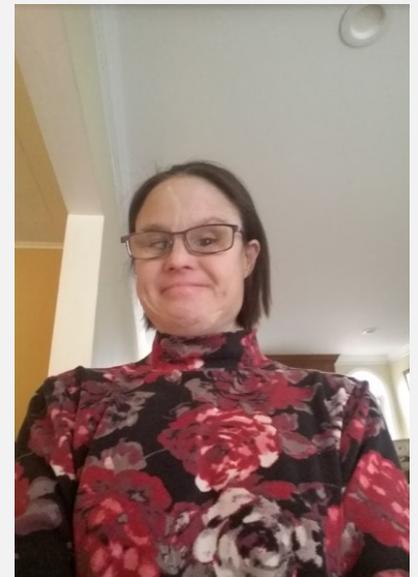
## Supported Employment

*By Janice McPhillips*

I work in the Montefiore Laundry Facility in the South Bronx. I started there as a volunteer for 6 months. My job included filing important papers in a file folder. I also had a book to organize papers for my boss. I then started using a computer to input information.

After 6 months they liked me so much they told me to put in for a part time job which I got on my own. I started folding and loading sheets, linen and blankets in an industrial factory. They then put me in the OR where I folded scrubs. I also folded towels which I am very good at.

I work 3 days a week from 9 am to 1 pm. I stand a lot on my feet and push carts a lot, too. I love the people there and I love my job. They hired me because I am a good worker, not because I have a disability.



## ART TATUM - JAZZ PIANIST & INSPIRATION TO ALL

by Ismael Nunez

In Jazz within the Afro-American community the piano has played a key role! Some of the most respected Jazz bandleaders who are Afro-American were Piano players and bandleaders. They are household names: Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Nat King Cole, Scott Joplin, Errol Garner. Let's not forget there were women also among them, Roberta Flack, and Hazel Scott.

And then there's Art Tatum.

Long before Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder became household names there was Art Tatum. As Wikipedia states proudly, "Arthur Tatum Jr. (October 13, 1909 - November 5, 1956) was an American jazz pianist who is widely considered one of the greatest jazz pianists of all time." They added, "His performances were hailed for their technical proficiency and creativity, which set a new standard for jazz piano virtuosity." Critic Scott Yanow wrote "His quick reflexes and boundless imagination kept his improvisations filled with fresh (and sometimes futuristic) ideas that put him way ahead of his contemporaries."



And yet, he had a disability. He was blind. WOW! If you ever see the Ken Burns documentary on Jazz you'll see his quick witt performance on piano as if you were looking at Hank Aaron hitting a home run.

It was reported he suffered from cataracts which left him blind in one eye and limited vision in the other. Molly Murphy, in her article for npr.org entitled Tatum Jazz Profiles, said "He received some formal training on the piano at the Toledo School of Music, learning to read sheet music with the aid of glasses and then in Braille. But Tatum was primarily self-taught, cribbing from piano rolls, phonograph recordings, and radio broadcasts while learning what he could from musicians he encountered."

Jazz Pianist legend Oscar Peterson said this about Tatum "When I heard him live, I said no one plays like Art Tatum."

Ray Charles, who was also visually impaired, said in a documentary called Piano Blues, "Hearing him play was almost as if there more than two people playing. When you hear me play, Oscar Peterson and Nat King Cole that was Tatum all in one."

His music and inspiration will live on for a long time.

## My Electric Motorbike

*by Steven Rudnick (Guest Contributor)*

I always have a wonderful time riding my electric motorbike all over Brooklyn very safety consciously as I always do and have done and will do of course.

I ride it everywhere that I want to go and need to go and much, much more as well.

My whole family is, and always has been tremendously proud of how well I control my electric motorbike and how much I love riding it.

My electric motorbike goes up to 20 mph and has a one horse power drive system. Also I always park and charge it in my bedroom. It goes up to 25 miles in an 8 hour charge as well as 20 M.P.H.

The five things I like best about riding my electric motorbike are exercise, transportation, recreation, socialization and a great total feeling of freedom and independence.



## Shopping in Brooklyn

*by Wayne Hoyte (Guest Contributor)*

I like to go shopping in Brooklyn for clothes and shoes and pants and I like to look around the stores and I like to buy things on sale and I get them cheaper on sale.

I go shopping with my sister Maureen. We take the train to Hoyt and Shermerhorn to go to Macy's.

I like to wear long sleeves, short sleeves and jeans. I bought a light blue long sleeve shirt.

I like to wear athletic shoes. I wear mostly blue and black.

I also like shopping at the supermarket. I buy groceries and food and drinks and orange juice and oranges and fruits and lettuce and broccoli and potatoes for my sister.

Shopping is fun!

## Lorenz Dance Experience

*by Ismael Nunez*

Every time after each performance this reporter says, “Not sure if I’ll do it again, let me think about it.” Yet I don’t know what brings this reporter back to performing again at the annual Lorenz Dance Gala Christmas Show at Astoria Manor on Astoria Blvd in Queens, NY.

Rosh Valdez, a dance instructor, who was my partner for the Bachata performance, told me “You got this. Relax. No one is perfect. Have fun. Be confident. You’re with good people.”

To prepare I often times had to attend private tutoring for which yours truly had to pay for. Yet looking back it was all worth it!

\*Bachata is a form of music and dance that originated in the countryside and rural marginal neighborhoods of the Dominican Republic. Its subjects are usually romantic. Especially prevalent are tales of heartbreak and sadness. Since originating in the Dominican Republic, Bachata dance has gone through many phases, and several sensual versions of Bachata have also developed: Dominican/Original Bachata, Traditional Bachata, Bachata Moderna, Urban Bachata, etc. (\*Excerpt from [www.lorenzdancestudio.com](http://www.lorenzdancestudio.com))



*Ismael and dance instructor Rosh Valdez*

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## Meet Self Advocate Member Jennifer

Jennifer Naftelowitz was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York and lives in Sheepshead Bay. Jennifer works at Morgan Stanley as a Restaurant Associate since 2013. She loves her job a lot and works five days a week. Jennifer lives with her mom in a nice apartment. Her hobbies are making jewelry, and in her spare time she likes singing in karaoke, going places like to the movies, sporting events, and seeing concerts in Coney Island.

