

The Independent

JUNE/JULY 2016

The Community Newsletter of Independence Care System

RESPONSIVE TO YOUR CALLS

Comparing good customer service to bad is like comparing warm sunshine to freezing rain. They can both make a huge difference to your day, and the latter can leave you feeling unhappy and hopeless.

At ICS, we often talk about how we can improve our customer service, or rather, how we can improve “the member experience.” Being member-centered is our top priority.

Thinking about our role in the quality of your member experience, we’ve been paying special attention in recent months to the fundamental ICS value of *responsiveness*. We analyzed the reasons members called and how they used our call center. We also paid attention to criticisms from the Member/Participant Advisory Council about long wait times and problems reaching the right person by phone. This led us to retool our Member Services call center to better respond to your needs.

This spring, we simplified our call center’s menu options, going from a three-tiered call tree (choose your language; choose your plan; choose your reason for calling) to a two-tiered call tree (choose your language; choose your reason for calling).

We also created a special line and service team to handle the high volume of calls we get from members about transportation. It’s option 1 on the

second tier of options, after you’ve chosen your language. The other options on that tier are 2-Rehab/Wheelchair Repair, 3-Member Services MLTC, 4-Member Services FIDA, 5-Dental Care, 6-Vision Care, 7-Pharmacy (for FIDA participants), and 8-Provider Relations.

This new system will reduce call queues and waiting times and get you where you need to go quickly and efficiently. It will also help us track your calls better so we can continue to monitor our responsiveness to you and your needs.

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“**Ahead of the curve, we saw that your active participation in decisions about your care is essential to your overall good health.**”

**From the Desk of Rick Surpin,
ICS President**

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*Care Management
Coordinator Angelica
Gonzalez and Human
Resources Coordinator
Erikat Piguave*

If you have the opportunity, I hope you will listen to our new **Independence Radio series of podcasts.** (See the article on page 8 for details.) If you do listen, you may notice a theme in the first episodes: the importance of playing an active role in your health care.

Traditionally, if you got sick, you went to the doctor, who would tell you what you were sick of and what to do to be cured of it. Your role as patient was strictly to follow doctor’s orders.



No longer is that relationship so lopsided, with all the power concentrated on the doctor’s side. We now have a more holistic view of how health care works best.

New models of health care talk about your relationship with your doctor as a “collaboration.” The idea is

that everybody should be an active participant in their health care, not just a passive recipient of the doctor’s medical wisdom—not just a “patient.” A doctor can tell you what you need to do without your input—they did just that for decades. But how much better is the plan that treats your intimate knowledge about your habits, needs and preferences, as just as important as their clinical knowledge?

Here at ICS, we have always thought of those we serve as “members.”

We have always recognized the centrality of our members in their health care. Ahead of the curve, we saw that your active participation in decisions about your care is essential to your overall good health. It is essential, but also does not happen all of the time—sometimes because we did not support you in a good way, sometimes because you did not want to participate, or both. We will always work to increase our ability to support you and to foster your participation in managing your own health.

In addition, we want you to take charge of your membership in the community of ICS. If you want to be more active, come to our Member/Participant Advisory Council and help us shape the community that you are a member of. At any time, tell us how you think we’re doing, good or bad.

“I’ve always been a person to take on responsibility,” says Pierrette Cesar, supervisor of the new Transportation Team of Member Services. Her history at ICS backs her up on that.

A native of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, who grew up in Brooklyn, Pierrette has long been interested in home health care. After graduating from a high school specializing in the health care professions, Pierrette worked her way through college as a home care attendant. That experience made her a great match for ICS, which she joined as a Member Services coordinator in 2012.

While working here full-time, Pierrette enrolled at the Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College for her master’s degree.

“It was tough,” she admits. “But ICS made it work for me.” Her supervisors figured out a way for Pierrette to do her graduate school internship at ICS. In addition to working at her full-time job, Pierrette fulfilled the internship requirement after hours.

When she began work on her master’s, Pierrette had been considering going into care management, or possibly moving on to another organization. The support she received made her decide to stick, not only with ICS, but with her colleagues in Member Services. “I felt I needed to give something back,” she said.

After graduating in May 2015, Pierrette got another nice surprise: She learned she was pregnant. (“Last year was an interesting year!” she says.)

Before going on maternity leave in December, Pierrette was promoted to her new position as head of the Transportation Team, which was designed to efficiently handle the way calls come through the Member Services call center.

Pierrette’s staff now handles all calls relating to transportation—bookings, questions and complaints. To reach her department, choose your language, then press 1.

“My staff has a particularly good ethic, better than any other place I’ve worked,” she says. “We always work together as a team. I love the way we support each other here.”

Transportation has long accounted for ICS’s highest volume of calls—often tens of thousands each month! Back in the office as of March, Pierrette is confident that her team can handle the challenge.



Pierrette Cesar is proud of her new Transportation Team.

“My staff has a particularly good ethic, better than any other place I’ve worked,” she says. “We always work together as a team. I love the way we support each other here.”

Come visit us online!
www.icsny.org

Read weekly blog posts at
www.icsny.org/blog

Get *The Independent* in Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Korean, Haitian Creole and Italian

Eye on Members

FAQ

What do I do if I suspect a provider is committing Medicaid fraud?

If you suspect that an ICS staff member or one of our providers has done something that may be a case of fraud or abuse of Medicaid, you can call the ICS Medicaid Fraud and Abuse Hotline at 1.855.427.8477. Any person who calls the hotline to report fraud they believe to be true is protected from retaliation.

WHAT'S NEW: DAVIS AND LIBERTY FOR ALL

Since our FIDA plan was rolled out in January 2015, FIDA participants have had access to the networks of two of our partners, Liberty Dental and Davis Vision. The great news is that now all members of ICS, whether you are in FIDA or our longstanding MLTC plan, are covered by both Liberty and Davis. This means any ICS member can access these high-quality networks for their vision and dental care needs. If you have questions about these services or claims with network providers, call Member Services at 1.877.ICS.2525. After choosing your language, press 5 for Liberty Dental or 6 for Davis Vision.

MEMBER COUNCIL UPDATE

At the February Member/Participant Advisory Council meeting in Brooklyn, Maureen Belluscio of New York Lawyers

for the Public Interest gave a presentation on Fair Housing laws in NYC as they pertain to people with disabilities. She said accessible housing enables people with disabilities to live independently. The front entrance (or reasonable substitute) must be wheelchair-accessible; common areas need to be accessible; bathrooms, kitchens, closets, etc., in the dwelling of the person with a disability need to be accessible; and people with disabilities need to have equal access to the stock of housing.

Most accessibility changes entail barrier removal: installing a ramp or lift, making doors wider, lowering thresholds, etc. The building age does not matter. The law is on the side of the person requesting a reasonable accommodation.

Discrimination is illegal, Maureen said. Failure to meet a reasonable request is discrimination. Outright exclusion based on disability or income is discrimination. Section 504, which covers public housing, and the ADA Titles II and III prohibit discrimination in housing against people with disabilities. Landlords may not retaliate against tenants who seek an accommodation or file a complaint.

Maureen gave her contact information for members needing legal help with housing discrimination: She is at NYLPI Monday,

Frida Cheban,
ICS member since 2013

“We are more than happy with the services we get at ICS. Every time we call we receive the support and advice we need.”

—Frida Cheban's aide, Olena Makoviy (not pictured)

Wednesday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Her number is 212-244-4664 or 212-244-3692.
Email: mbelluscio@nylpi.org.

All members and their caregivers are welcome to attend Member/Participant Advisory Council Meetings. The next council meeting is listed on the calendar on page 12 of this issue.

MEMBER MAILBAG

Love *The Independent*? Or have thoughts on how we can improve? We want to hear from you! Please email feedback to theindependent@icsny.org. Or mail your comments to: Christofer Pierson, Independence Care System, 25 Elm Place, 5th Floor, Brooklyn NY 11201.



ICS FAST FACTS!

Member Services received **61,688 calls about transportation** in the first quarter of 2016.

The new dedicated Transportation line has received more than **20,000 calls** since opening in March.

In the first month of the new call system, the MLTC line received **7,953 calls**.

In that same month, the FIDA line received **465 calls**.

What fast fact do you want to know about ICS? Send your fast fact requests to theindependent@icsny.org

SPECIAL SUMMER EVENT 2016

If you missed the first annual Disability Pride Parade through the heart of Manhattan last summer, take heart: You can join ICS for the second annual parade on July 10. And this year history will be made again as Pride goes international: Marchers in Palermo, Italy, are coordinating their parade with the one in New York City. This year's parade starts in Union Square Park and goes up Broadway to Madison Square Park (reversing last year's route to minimize exposure to the sun), winding up with a festival that will last until 4:00 p.m. The ICS contingent will meet in Union Square at 10:00 a.m. RSVP by June 27 to latricia.james@icsny.org (or call the reservations hotline 1.877.958.8427) with your shirt size to get a free T-shirt commemorating the day.

Luis Checo, ICS member since 2013

“Thank you very much, ICS!”

Milagros “Millie” Franco has a cause. It started when she heard a piece on the radio about something called the Out of the Darkness Walk, set to take place in early June. “I liked the name,” she says. “It caught my attention. I’ve always wanted to do a walk.”

This event, it turns out, is to raise awareness about suicide prevention. At first, Millie did not see her participation as anything other than something to do for herself. Millie had no connection to the cause of suicide prevention other than believing in the importance of normalizing mental illness, treating it like other disabilities, and not sweeping it under the rug. Her own disabilities are mainly physical, related to cerebral palsy, but she feels solidarity with friends who have mental illness. “We all have mental health issues,” she says.

With an unexpected bit of news, the walk became very personal. A friend in another state began hinting that he was having suicidal thoughts, and Millie became worried. “I said, you may not want to live, but others want you to. Please hang in there.”

Unfortunately, Millie learned that to participate in the walk, she would have to raise \$1,000 in short order. “I started a little too late,” she says. She realized she would not qualify to participate officially. Nevertheless, her heart was fully in, so Millie resolved that she would keep raising money for the cause on her Facebook page in any case.

A New Yorker through and through, Millie was born in Queens, lives in Manhattan, and works as a disability housing advocate for the Brooklyn Center for the Independence of the Disabled (BCID).

“I’ve thought about leaving New York,” the 39-year-old ICS member says, “but I’m worried

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the level of services would go down, so I might as well stay put.” A graduate of Long Island University, Millie has held her position, which entails helping people fill out applications for Disability Rent Increase Exemptions and Section 8 recertifications, for nine years.

Her own housing situation might be described as crowded: she shares her home with two rescued birds. “I’m a sucker for dogs and birds,” Millie says. Tito Jackson (“I didn’t name him,” she insists) is a “scrawny” cockatiel. Sweetpea, a female Quaker monk parrot, says, “hello,” “uh-oh,” and “give me a kiss.” “She doesn’t curse,” Millie says. “She’s a lady.”

You can help Millie raise money for Out of the Darkness by visiting her Facebook page, www.facebook.com/milagros.franco.9022.

Milagros Franco wants to raise money and awareness for suicide prevention.



Health and Prevention

TRANSITIONS OF CARE: AVOIDING THE REVOLVING HOSPITAL DOOR

During any given month, ICS has about 300 members (out of more than 6,000) in the hospital. Sixty percent of those are in for potentially avoidable conditions like urinary tract infections (UTIs), pressure ulcers, respiratory conditions and falls. Almost one in ten—just under 30 per month—has been readmitted for the same condition they were last in the hospital for.

“We can do better,” says Stephanie Reynolds, director of Transitions of Care at ICS. Stephanie and her Transitions Team (which also includes field nurses Ruby Rodriguez and Denise Duncan, Transition Care Specialists Zoraida Rios and Veronica Walcott, and Transition Coordinator Jovanni Ayala) are collaborating with other ICS departments to help keep our members from being stuck in a revolving hospital door.

A Pilot Expands

For the last year, the Transitions Team has looked at every hospitalization of a Bronx member to determine if that member was at risk for being rehospitalized. The team considered the member’s medical history, the complexity of the condition, the soundness of the

the member’s care team. “We ‘borrow’ the member while they’re hospitalized and then make a decision on whether to return him or her to the care management team after they’re discharged, or whether a Transitions nurse should take over the initial post-hospital period. We also manage the facility discharge and make sure all pieces are put together to avoid another hospitalization.”

The Transitions pilot has now expanded to virtually all of the Bronx and most of Brooklyn. Expansion to all of the care management teams, including Manhattan and Queens, will probably be rolled out later this year. “We want to make sure that our processes work before we expand it to everybody,” Stephanie says.

Positive Change

ICS has already noticed positive change on the rehospitalization front. Since July 2015,

Stephanie says, the hospitalization rate (overall) has remained steady at 4 percent despite an increase in the number of members. The average re-hospitalization rate in 2015 was 7.8 percent, down from 8.2 percent for the period from June to December 2014.

“Hospitals are the worst places for sick people to be,” Stephanie stresses. “We want to keep members home. That’s where they belong.”

Want More Info?

- Read the full story on the Transitions Team at www.icsny.org/the-ics-transition-team-2.
- Listen to Stephanie Reynolds tell host Stephanie Wallace about how to avoid unnecessary hospital stays on Independence Radio at soundcloud.com/icsny/independence-radio-podcast-2.

“Hospitals are the worst places for sick people to be,” Stephanie stresses. “We want to keep members home. That’s where they belong.”

discharge plan, and whether the member was able to understand why they were hospitalized and what was expected of them upon release. The team would then report this information to the care manager, giving them better information about their members’ needs upon getting home from the hospital.

The Transitions Team developed a system of offering support to both the member and

The Sound of Independence

There's a new way to get information from ICS.

Independence Radio is a series of podcasts for the ICS community featuring lively conversations on health, disability, aging well, advocacy, the arts and more. ICS member Stephanie Wallace, who hosts her own internet radio show, Love and Intimacy for the Disabled (LAID) on BlogTalkRadio.com, asks the questions and leads the discussions. Her guests are interesting and expert folks in the ICS community, including staff, leadership and members.

WHY (AND WHAT IS) A PODCAST?

Podcasts get their names from the Apple iPod, on which they were first made available in the middle of the first decade of this century. Essentially, they are digital sound files you can download to a personal listening device like an iPod, or more typical these days, a smartphone, and listen to on demand. You can also listen online, without downloading to a device. Usually podcasts come in a series of episodes you can subscribe to.

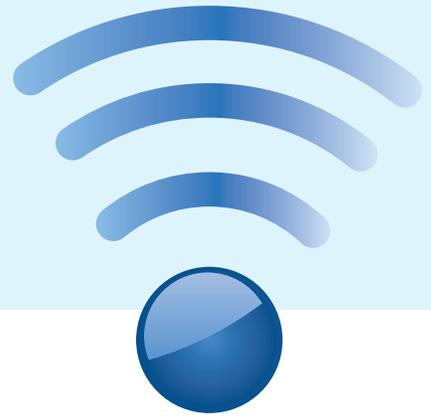
Why is ICS hopping on the podcasting train? We want to reach our members where they want to be reached. In our recent Independent Reader Survey, we learned that most of our older members (65 and up) are just fine with print. But we also found that the younger our members, the more likely they are to want to get their information from digital sources like computers and smartphones. We know members of all ages will enjoy this engaging audio format.

ENRICHED UNDERSTANDING

At ICS we also believe that offering multiple media sources enriches understanding, adding new dimensions to information. It's one thing to read Member Advocate Marcus Johnson's transcribed eloquence on the subject of self-advocacy; it's quite another to listen to his and Stephanie's passion as they talk about this truly vital issue. In the future, as you find a story in *The Independent* that interests you, you may well be able to follow up on it by listening to Independence Radio.

We are very fortunate to have the talented Stephanie Wallace as our host. We know you'll enjoy her humor, intelligence, curiosity, and perspective as much as we do.

"I am very fond of ICS, and I fully recognize the positive impact it has had on my life," Stephanie says. "As an interviewer, though, I will always represent the consumer's point of view. It is very important to me to bring to the ICS consumer information that will help them get the most out of their services—and, on the other side, to help ICS understand the needs of consumers."



INDEPENDENCE RADIO: AVAILABLE PODCASTS

You can listen to Independence Radio, with Stephanie Wallace, at <https://soundcloud.com/icsny>.

Episode 1 Marcus Johnson, ICS Member Advocate: Advocating for Yourself

Episode 2 Stephanie Reynolds, ICS Director of Transitions: Staying out of the Hospital

Episode 3 Kwame Kitson, ICS Medical Director: Communicating with Your Doctor

Episode 4 Damon Rozier, ICS Member and Entertainer: From Anger to Laughter

If you're unable to access the podcasts online and would like to hear them, please call Chris Pierson at 1.646.653.6279 and we will try to make them available to you.

Come be inspired...

Don't miss the 2016
ICS Art Show!

To register to attend, call 877-958-8427 or email: events@icsny.org

July 8, 2016
3pm - 8pm

ICS Brooklyn Office
25 Elm Place, 5th Floor
(Between Livingston St.
and Fulton Mall)

In News

New Laws Make NYC Government More Accessible

City government websites enable New Yorkers to get information, file a complaint or apply for important services all from the comfort of home.

Using a city website, you can apply for a marriage license, order a copy of your birth certificate, enter a housing lottery, apply for SNAP Food Stamp benefits, book an accessible taxi, manage your Access-a-Ride account, get free help to stop smoking and much, much more. But if you can't access the city's websites, these online services may as well not exist.

Last month New York City enacted a number of laws to make city services more accessible for people with disabilities, including one to adopt accessibility standards for its websites.

Website accommodations for people with disabilities might include:

- making clickable links and areas large so people who can't control

a mouse easily can still use them

- coding pages so that they can be navigated using a single-switch access device or a keyboard alone
- including closed captions and sign language interpretation with videos
- providing descriptions for website images and links that allow blind users access with text-to-speech software and text-to-Braille hardware
- visual enhancements that make it easier for people with reduced vision to navigate

Another new law requires all notices and advertising materials for public events hosted by city agencies to include information about the accessibility of the event. There's nothing like showing up for an event only to find that you can't get in. Having to include accessibility

information will help prevent those scenarios, and including details of an event's accessibility should make the city work harder to live up to the Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as state and local accessibility laws.

Perhaps the most important new disability access law is one requiring every city agency to have in place by June a disability service facilitator—someone who will serve as the agency's primary contact, and help coordinate services, for people with disabilities.

The NYC Parks Department and Department of Transportation have already hired disability service facilitators. Read more about them on the ICS blog at www.icsny.org/nyc-parks-the-ada/ and www.icsny.org/meet-dots-quemuel-arroyo/.

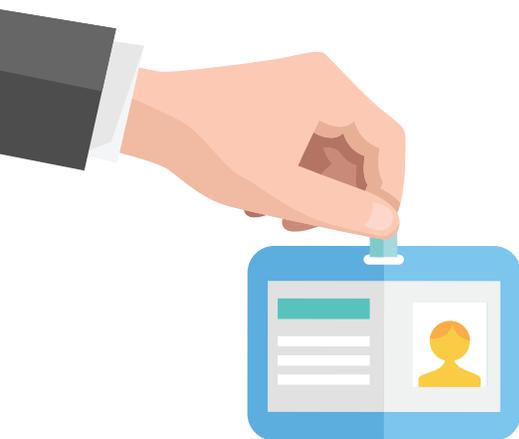
IDNYC: Your Key to NYC Social Programs

IDNYC is the new, free identification card for all New York City residents, especially those who don't have a New York State ID or license.

IDNYC benefits every city resident, including the most vulnerable communities—the homeless, youth, the elderly, undocumented immigrants, the formerly incarcerated and others who may have difficulty obtaining other government-issued ID.

Even if you don't need an ID, there are benefits to having an IDNYC, including free memberships at 40 major NYC cultural institutions (museums, performing arts centers, botanical gardens, zoos, etc.).

If you would like to get an IDNYC card for yourself or if you would like to find out more for someone else, visit www1.nyc.gov/site/idnyc/index.page.



COMMUNITY CORNER

A listing of activities and opportunities to meet with, speak with, support and get support from other members of the ICS community.

ICS MEMBER GROUPS

Women's Empowerment Initiative Group

For ICS members who are women striving to inspire, educate, and build self-esteem and advocacy. Light refreshments served.

Every other Friday, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m., at ICS Brooklyn.

June 24; July 8 and 22; August 5 and 19.

If interested in joining, please contact your care manager by calling Member Services at 1.877.ICS.2525.

Men's Group

A support group aiming to build a united brotherhood, to advocate and achieve life goals in the community inside and outside of ICS, to let men know that disability doesn't stop them. Light refreshments served.

Every other Friday, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., at ICS Brooklyn.

June 24; July 8 and 22; August 5 and 19.

If interested in joining, contact Lenford Bryan at 1.347.446.0764 or Latricia James at 1.718.9037.1622.

Rainbow Connection

For ICS Members who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning their sexuality. Family, friends and ICS members who support the LGBTQ community are also welcome. Light refreshments served.

Every other Wednesday,

from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at ICS Brooklyn.

June 29; July 13 and 27; August 10 and 24.

If interested in joining, contact Michelle Mitchell at 1.212.996.7329, Julia Yopez at 1.347.365.2108, or Latricia James at 1.718.907.1622.

MS SOCIETY ACTIVITIES AT ICS

For more information about either of the programs below, please call the MS Society at 1.212.463.7787.

Wellness Class with Millie

Every Thursday from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. at ICS Brooklyn.

Adult Day Program

The Adult Day Program is designed to promote participation in social, educational, fitness and recreational activities.

Every other Thursday 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at ICS Brooklyn.

June 30; July 14 and 28; August 11 and 25.

OF INTEREST TO ICS MEMBERS

Love and Intimacy for the Disabled (LAID)

A live internet call-in radio show about sex, love, dating, and relationships for people with disabilities, with your hosts ICS members Stephanie Wallace, Tyson Cherry, Vernita Worrell and Don Baker.

Mondays at 6:00 p.m. Eastern Time, on www.blogtalkradio.com/laid

Disabled in Action

DIA is a civil rights organization committed to ending discrimination against people with disabilities—all disabilities. DIA fights to eliminate the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from enjoying full equality in American society. Founded in 1970, DIA is a democratic, not-for-profit, tax-exempt, membership organization. DIA consists primarily of and is directed by people with disabilities. We believe in the motto, "Nothing about us, without us!" For more information:

www.disabledinaction.org.

General Membership Meetings are held monthly at Selis Manor, 1st Floor Auditorium, 135 West 23rd Street (between 6th and 7th Avenues) in Manhattan, 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Summer dates: July 17 and August 21.

Able News

The newspaper for people with disabilities for more than 20 years. It is widely known in the disability community; a monthly newspaper that is published for, by and about the disabled. Read Able online at ablenews.com.

If you have an item of interest to the ICS community that you'd like to share in The Independent's Community Corner, please send it to Sharifa Abu-Hamda at Independence Care System, 25 Elm Place, Fifth Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201, or send an email to theindependent@icsny.org.

Take full charge of your transportation! Ask your care manager about the Metro-Plus monthly MetroCard program.

ICS PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

For a full calendar of ICS social programs and special events, visit www.icsny.org.

Weekdays

Arts and Crafts Programs
ICS Brooklyn, various times

Tuesdays

Creative Writing Circle
ICS Manhattan, 5:00-8:30 p.m.

Wednesdays

Arts Programs, ICS Bronx
10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

Thursdays

Music for Everyone
ICS Brooklyn, 3:00-5:00 p.m.

Movies at ICS

ICS Brooklyn, 5:00-8:30 p.m.

Fridays

Hangout (bingo, board games,
karaoke night), ICS Brooklyn
5:00-8:30 p.m.

June

23 ICS Member Council/Participant
Advisory Committee, ICS Bronx
1:00-4:00 p.m.

July

8 The Art Show, ICS Brooklyn
4:00-8:30 p.m.

10 The Disability Pride Parade and
Festival, Union Square to Madison
Square, 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Details on page 5

Holiday Closings

All ICS offices closed

No social programs:

July 4, Independence Day.
(Offices close 3:00 p.m., Friday, July 1)

September 5, Labor Day. (Offices close
3:00 p.m., Friday, September 2)

*Note: Programming may be canceled
without prior notice due to inclement
weather.*

ICS Brooklyn

25 Elm Place, 5th Floor

ICS Manhattan

257 Park Avenue South, 2nd Floor

ICS Bronx

400 East Fordham Road, 10th Floor

**Transportation not provided.
Please speak to your care manager
about reimbursement for use
of mass transit, including
Access-A-Ride.**

