

## **Real Choice Systems Change Grant Project**

### **Grant Application from the City of Bridgeport**

#### **Description of your community and your community inclusion achievements to date.**

Bridgeport is the largest city in Connecticut with 139, 529 residents and the fourth largest city in New England. Bridgeport is the most densely populated city in Connecticut with approximately 8, 720 people per square mile and serves as the central city for the towns of Stratford, Monroe, Trumbull, Fairfield and Easton providing access to hospitals and medical facilities, the court system, colleges and universities and other critical services. Dubbed the “Park City” Bridgeport has 57 parks and 1,325 acres of parkland. Bridgeport is a City rich in culture and diversity. The population in Bridgeport is more than half minority—55%. Whites comprise 45% of the City’s total population, and African Americans constitute 30.8%. Fully, 31.9% of the City’s population is Hispanic or Latino. American Indians and Alaska Natives accounted for 0.5% of the total and Asians, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders comprised 3.4%.

Approximately 14.8% of respondents declared themselves “other” and 5.6% chose the census bureau’s new multiracial category. The broader surrounding communities’ populations are a majority white. It is estimated that approximately 20% or 27,000 residents of the City have disabilities.

The City of Bridgeport continues to struggle with social and economic stressors that affect the quality of life for residents. In February of 2003, the Connecticut Department of Labor reported a 9.4% unemployment rate in Bridgeport compared to 6.6% for the region and 5% nationally. In certain census tracks and enterprise community neighborhoods in Bridgeport the unemployment rate soars to more than 25%.

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During one of the most prosperous periods of economic growth in Connecticut, 1995-1997, Bridgeport jobs grew by only .2%. The child poverty rate in Bridgeport is among the worst in the country for a city of its size. In certain neighborhoods, the rate exceeds 70%. Children living in poverty are more likely to experience poor health, an increase school drop out rate, hunger, homelessness, violence and disabilities. During the boom years, Bridgeport's children got poorer. 5.61% of Bridgeport residents receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) as compared to 2.02% statewide. Forty percent of children in Bridgeport live in single parent homes compared to 20% statewide and 32% nationally. The teenage pregnancy rate in Bridgeport is 18.9% compared to 8.3% for Connecticut. The latest census data shows 38%, or approximately 52,820 adult residents lack a High School Diploma. The cumulative 4-year drop out rate for the class of 2000 was 23.6% compared to 12.2% statewide. While violent crime has been on the decline in Bridgeport and nationally, the Connecticut Municipal Profiles, CT Policy and Economic Council, shows Bridgeport with significantly higher rates of crime per 1000 population than the rest of Connecticut, at 60.5 and 33.8 percent respectively. The 2000 census shows a 5% decrease in available housing stock making affordable housing a major issue facing residents. While Bridgeport certainly has significant challenges to face, it is known for its strong non-profit and social service infrastructure and innovative approaches to improving the quality of life for residents.

A number of outstanding efforts of inclusive living for people with disabilities are in process in the City of Bridgeport. These existing efforts go across lifespan and life needs and were identified by the Bridgeport Real Choice Task Force that has been established.

**Employment and Training-** An exciting and successful initiative is underway through The WorkPlace, Inc., Southwestern Connecticut's Workforce Investment Board.

***EveryOne-Works*** received more than \$900,000 in funding from the U.S. Department of Labor last year to improve access, accommodations and make the CT Works One Stop Career Center a welcoming place for people with disabilities. All services are provided in a fully integrated environment. The project addresses a number of objectives including: enhancing the capabilities of the One-Stop Centers to ensure accessible seamless service delivery, providing outreach to SSI and SSDI beneficiaries and other persons with disabilities including youth and those deemed hardest to serve, establishing procedures for identifying persons with hidden disabilities, providing services to businesses to create more employment options, and training and staff development intended to increase capacity, improve public attitudes and promote awareness. In the first six months of the project, 142 individuals with disabilities were served with almost 50% returning for multiple visits and services geared toward securing employment.

Other employment efforts and supports are available through the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and Department of Mental Retardation. These services include youth and adult transition to work programs and support towards securing and maintaining competitive employment.

**Housing-** The Bridgeport Continuum of Care, through HUD funding, has done outstanding work in the area of supportive permanent housing for homeless individuals and families with psychiatric and co-occurring disorders. Since 1992, approximately 1,000 have been served. The Continuum has placed a strong emphasis on integrated

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housing opportunities. Consumer involvement and input is a cornerstone of all of the Continuum's efforts.

Several other noteworthy initiatives help folks have greater access to their homes and stay in their homes longer. The Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County's SSBG-Home Services/ Home Repair and Accessibility program works in partnership with the City of Bridgeport Office of Persons with Disabilities. The Home Repairs program philosophy is that in order to fully access their community people with disabilities must be able to first enter, fully use and exit their homes at will. Another important service is the Senior Chores program funded by the Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging and operated by the City of Bridgeport Department on Aging. The goal of the program is to provide seniors with needed support services so that they can remain independent in their own homes. This is accomplished through three objectives; Assisting seniors with maintenance tasks beyond their abilities, checking to ensure that seniors' homes are secure and that basic needs are being met, and, making proper social service referrals when necessary.

**Daycare-** Action for Bridgeport Community Development (ABCD) is one example of available daycare throughout the City that provides daycare services for children with disabilities in a fully integrated environment from infant care through preschool.

**School system-** The Bridgeport Public School system, which has an active student population of nearly 24,000 students, is moving from segregated services for students with disabilities to an integrated system. Just last year Sheridan school, which housed alternative education programs, closed and programs were brought back to each of the three High Schools. Also, the Lighthouse After school programs provides support

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services for youth with disabilities at 10 after school sites. Services are provided in integrated settings. A counselor trained and employed by the Kennedy Center works with the children.

**Public Access to stores, businesses and restaurants** – The City of Bridgeport sponsors a curb cut program to make it easier for people with disabilities, seniors and others to move throughout the City.

**Social support networks**- The Disability Resource Center of Fairfield County has a peer-mentoring program that works with Bridgeport students among others. Peer Mentoring is a response to the legal requirements of IDEA, the ADA, and other federal and state laws that seek to ensure that students with disabilities participate in the activities enjoyed by their non-disabled peers. The Program pairs students with disabilities with adults with disabilities. The primary goal is to demonstrate to young people that having a disability is not a barrier to a full life. A mentor can become someone to whom the students can ask questions that people without disabilities cannot really answer. The students are able to share their experiences more openly with an adult with disabilities thereby receiving excellent supports.

**Public attitudes and awareness** - Recently the Chief State Attorney's Office submitted a grant to the U.S. Department of Justice for funds to minimize abuse of disabled and elderly residents in Bridgeport. The Bridgeport Police Department, Department of Human Services, Office of Persons with Disabilities and Department on Aging will all participate in the project if awarded. The project will train system workers, elderly and disabled residents and members of the general public around issues of abuse. Other important efforts to affect public attitudes and awareness exist through out the system of

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providers working with people with disabilities in Bridgeport. The Office of Persons with Disabilities, which is a Department within the City of Bridgeport, has an outstanding reputation for promoting community inclusion through the lifespan. Last year the Office had 1211 individuals attend training presentations, 28 individuals attend presentations for disability support groups, 340 folks received information and referral, and 42 received advocacy/ protective services. Karen Roseman, the Department's Director since 1979, is one of the driving forces behind Bridgeport's Real Choice movement.

**Community Inclusion Task Force description**

The group that has come together will *champion* further efforts to promote community inclusion through systems change, resources and service development while promoting public awareness. The Task Force is diverse in its makeup and incorporates involvement from consumers and family members, City administration, State agencies, the public school system, public transportation, elderly and social services, public housing, consumer organizations, youth organizations, private providers.

The Task Force has already been activated. On March 21, 2003 the City of Bridgeport Department of Human Services and the Office of Persons with Disabilities convened the membership of the Task Force for an organizing meeting and subsequent planning session to identify existing achievements and to determine and prioritize barriers to full community inclusion in Bridgeport. The outcomes of that planning session are the basis for this application and the actions being proposed. The excitement and enthusiasm surrounding this effort has been extraordinary. The Task Force assembled has the insight, knowledge and influence to make real systems change and establish Bridgeport as a model for community inclusion for all residents. The anticipated

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start up timeline below will result in swift activation and implementation of Bridgeport’s Real Choice Systems change strategies.

<u>Month</u>	<u>Activity</u>
Month 1	Full Task Force meeting to formalize leadership, establish sub committees, meeting schedules and initial priorities.
Month 2	Full Task Force meeting and meeting of all standing sub committees to formalize goals. Work toward initial priorities begins.
Month 3	Full Task Force meeting and working meetings of all standing sub committees to implement priorities and strategies to achieve outcomes. Progress reports to Full Task Force.
Month 4 - ongoing	Quarterly meeting of Full Task Force, minimum of monthly working meetings of sub committees. Add other ad hoc committees as necessary. Progress reports from sub committees and staff to full Task Force.

The City of Bridgeport Office of Disabilities will coordinate and staff Bridgeport’s initiative and in concert with the Task Force, harness efforts for community inclusion, draw in new resources and continue to identify needs, prioritize efforts and sustain a community wide movement for inclusive living in Bridgeport.

**Description of the primary challenges facing this community in the development of an inclusive community for all persons with disabilities across the lifespan.**

The Bridgeport Real Choice Task Force has identified a number of challenges facing the community that impede the development of an inclusive community for all residents.

The challenges were identified through personnel experience, the experience of family members and by organizations that serve people with disabilities. The Task Force does not want to imply that this is a complete list; in fact, an ongoing effort to identify and

remedy other impediments will be a major responsibility of the Task Force. The

following list represents the primary challenges facing the Bridgeport community:

1. **Public attitudes** at all levels toward people with disabilities are a major barrier to an inclusive community.
2. While a cadre of services is available in Bridgeport, consumers felt strongly that there is a **resource and information gap**, in other words, consumers do not always know where to find services or who to contact.
3. **Affordable, accessible, safe housing and support services** to keep folks situated are a major problem in the Bridgeport community.
4. **Public parks** have accessibility issues throughout the City.
5. While the City of Bridgeport has a **curb cut program**, the priorities are determined by the Department of Public Facilities with little to no input from consumers or departments or organizations representing consumers.
6. Ironically, **access to medical facilities** in the City surfaced as a major concern for Bridgeport residents and as a central City, residents of surrounding communities are limited by this as well.
7. It was identified that the **infrastructure for referral, advocacy and social services was diminishing** causing concern among consumers and providers.
8. **Grandparents raising grandchildren with disabilities** are having difficulty in obtaining housing, finding respite and other services specific to their situation.
9. The lack of understanding with regard to **personal assistants** and their employment and the lack of available **assistants**.

10. People with certain **types of disabilities** may encounter more difficulty in obtaining services and accommodations. One reason was determined because the State lacks a service agency available for these individuals.

**Plan for using the funding**

The Bridgeport Real Choice Task Force has established a set of strategies to address the immediately identified obstructions to community inclusion in Bridgeport. The strategies are tied to specific outcomes. As new issues arise and strategies are discussed, the plan and projected project outcomes will be revised.

**Project Plan:**

<u><i>Challenges</i></u>	<u><i>Strategies to enhance community inclusion capacity</i></u>	<u><i>Outcomes</i></u>
Public attitudes	-Promote inclusion of people with disabilities on boards and commissions. Provide Board training through the United Way of Fairfield County’s Project Blue Print which currently does this for minorities. One Task Force Member is a United Way Board Member and will facilitate this. -Local public awareness campaign	12 individuals with disabilities will participate in Project Blue Print and be placed on Boards and Commissions.  1,500 of youth and adults in the general community will be reached through the public awareness campaign.
Resource and information gap	-Develop a comprehensive, user friendly guide for community inclusion and distribute widely to adults and seniors with a specialized version for youth	9,000 guides will be distributed to adults and seniors with disabilities.  1,200 guides will be distributed to youth with disabilities in the community.
Affordable, accessible, acceptable housing and support services	-Both Continuum of Care co chairs are Real Choice Task Force members.	-Continuum of Care will apply for \$600,000 over three years in additional

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	<p>Pursue additional grants through HUD and other sources to increase permanent supportive housing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educate landlords and housing providers on the needs of people with disabilities</li> <li>-Explore homeownership opportunities through Home of Your Own, Co-op Initiatives and others</li> </ul>	<p>funds to increase permanent supportive housing opportunities in Bridgeport by 10 one bedroom units.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Bi annually landlord training and training for housing providers will be sponsored by the Task Force to promote awareness and action. A minimum of ten landlords per year will receive training. The City’s Fair Housing Officer and Connecticut Legal Services will assist with these workshops.</li> <li>- Meeting will be held in year one to discuss homeownership opportunities</li> </ul>
Access to public parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Engage the Parks Department in the Real Choice Task Force</li> <li>-Seek funding to systematically improve access to City parks (The Central Grants Office has already established a list of grant possibilities that can be pursued)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A minimum of one person representing the Parks Department will sign on to the Task Force.</li> <li>- An inventory of necessary accommodations and access issues will be prepared on the City Parks and funds will be sought to make improvements and accommodations for children and adults.</li> </ul>
Prioritization of curb cuts	<p>-Use the influence of the Task Force to change the procedure for determining how curb cuts are prioritized. Allow Task Force and consumers input in prioritization.</p>	<p>- A prioritized list of curb cuts will be put together and submitted to public facilities. The Task Force will establish a procedure with Public Facilities for notification of future needs.</p>
Access to medical facilities	<p>-Outreach and education to medical facilities that are not easily accessible. Utilize Task Force membership to advocate for</p>	<p>-A list of medical facilities with access issues will be compiled. The Task Force will host an annual meeting to promote better</p>

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	improvements.	accessibility to these facilities. A minimum of 5 facilities will make changes as a result of our efforts.
Diminishing infrastructure for resources, referral and advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dedicate staff in the Office of Disabilities to community inclusion efforts.</li> <li>- Advocate for a moratorium on further resource and social service cuts at the State Legislature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Staff will ensure objectives are achieved and Task Force and Sub Committee work is accomplished. They will increase service levels by a minimum of 10%.</li> <li>- A minimum of one meeting will be held with Legislators and local elected officials annually to advocate for increased resources.</li> </ul>
Grandparents raising grandchildren with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Examine conflicting regulations which create barriers for families in this situation. Advocate for policy changes with Housing Authority and other providers.</li> <li>- Research best practice programs and alternatives for this population. Seek funds to expand the Social Service Department Grand parenting program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- At least 2 best practice initiatives in this area will be presented to the Task Force for consideration</li> </ul>
Trained personal assistants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Plan with the Regional Workforce Investment Board and the CT Works One Stop Career Center for possible job training to prepare additional workers. Seek additional funds to recruit and prepare workers in coordination with statewide efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grant will be coordinated and submitted through the Task Force and appropriate partnerships to promote job training and additional funding for personal assistants in Bridgeport resulting in a minimum of 10 additional available, well trained staff.</li> </ul>
Disparity of resources for people with certain disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Evaluate gaps for specific disabilities and advocate for the State to determine a Department to serve the needs of individuals currently not being served.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Service providers will report a reduction in the number of individuals unable to access services.</li> </ul>