



University of  
Connecticut

**A.J. Pappanikou Center for Developmental Disabilities**

*A University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service*

*November 2005*

# **Accessibility of Public and Private Places In Connecticut**

*Real Choice Briefing Paper #1*

**Dale Borman Fink, Ph.D.**

Christine M. Gaynor, M.A., *Project Coordinator*

Mary Beth Bruder, Ph.D., *Principal Investigator*

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**REAL  
CHOICE**



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# ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PLACES IN CONNECTICUT

## REAL CHOICE BRIEFING PAPER #1

### **Real Choice Briefing Papers**

This paper, along with others in the series, is a product of the Real Choice System Change project at the University of Connecticut A.J. Pappanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities in Farmington, Connecticut. The project's aim is to help communities in Connecticut to become more inclusive of persons with disabilities in all arenas, including but not limited to schooling, employment, recreation, and community involvement.

The papers in this series are based on a (non-random) sample of 250 individuals with disabilities who completed an in-depth survey. Three-quarters of the respondents were adults and one-quarter children; they resided in 90 of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns.

For more information about the Center or the Real Choice System Change project please visit our website, <http://www.uconnucedd.org/>.

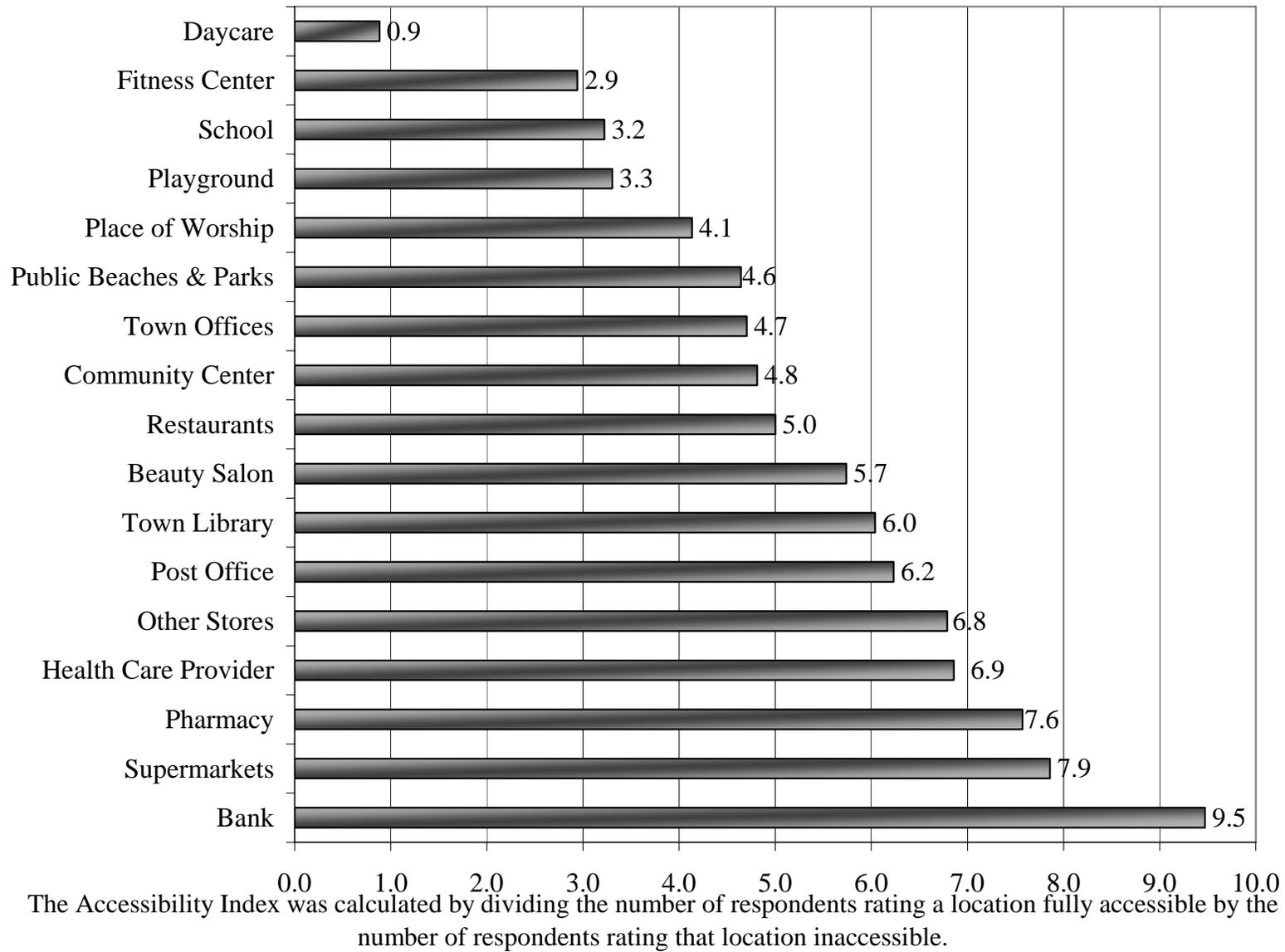
## ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PLACES IN CONNECTICUT

We asked Connecticut residents with disabilities to tell us if stores, public parks, barbershops/beauty parlors and other public and private places in their communities were “fully accessible,” “partially accessible,” or “not accessible.” We defined “fully accessible” as meaning not only that they were physically able to enter the setting but also that they were able to use the services.

We then divided the number of survey respondents rating a given venue as fully accessible by the number rating the same one as not accessible. We called the resulting number the accessibility index. Thus, if the same number of respondents rated a place fully accessible and not accessible, its accessibility index would be 1.0. If 5 times more rated it fully than not accessible, the index would be 5.0. (Ratings of “partially accessible” did not influence the index.)

Figure 7 shows the accessibility index computed for the venues we asked about in our survey. Those at the top are the ones rated the least accessible and those on the bottom were rated the most accessible by our sample.

**Figure 7: Accessibility Index**



## **Banks, pharmacies, and supermarkets most accessible**

There were four entities that nearly two-thirds of our respondents rated as fully accessible: the supermarket, the post office, the bank, and the pharmacy. The somewhat larger percentage of respondents rating the post office as not accessible reduced its index, leaving the other three venues (supermarket, bank, and pharmacy) as the ones receiving the greatest approval from our survey respondents. Our respondents rated health care providers only slightly less favorably.

Among public places, the town library and the post office were not very far behind the top-rated institutions in accessibility. Community centers and town offices were rated somewhat less favorably. Public beaches and parks, playgrounds, and schools were viewed on average as considerably less accessible than the top-rated places.

Among private entities (besides those mentioned earlier as being top-rated), beauty salons/barbershops drew better ratings than restaurants, which in turn did much better than fitness centers (2.9).

Houses of worship did not fare impressively, with 50% stating their chosen religious venues were fully accessible but 12% rating their preferred houses of worship as not accessible.

Daycare was the only entity on the list of 17 that more respondents rated not accessible than fully accessible and therefore received an accessibility index below 1.0.

## **Respondents with physical disabilities**

Because individuals with physical disabilities are more likely than others to encounter accessibility problems, we separated the accessibility ratings of all respondents ages 18 and over who had a physical disability. The supermarket and the bank still rated very well among this sub sample (7.0 and 6.8 accessibility indices, respectively). However, the post office (3.4) did not rate as favorably as among survey respondents as a whole. Nearly 17% (one in six) found their post offices to be not accessible. Town offices (2.9) and public beaches and parks (1.6) also did not rate well among this sample, with 17% and 20% selecting not accessible for these two locales, respectively.

## **What does the law require?**

The Americans with Disabilities Act is a federal civil rights law protecting people with disabilities from discrimination by state and local government (Title II) and by private business (Title III). The activities and buildings listed in this report that are sponsored by state agencies and municipalities (Title II) must be accessible to children and adults with disabilities; this is a very high standard, and it has been in effect for over thirteen years. Two key documents that the ADA requires from each state agency and each municipality are a Self-Evaluation and a Transition Plan, detailing how the agency or municipality would provide program access to any activity or service they offer. Denying program access to a child or adult with a disability is a violation of federal law.

Private businesses – referred to in the ADA as places of public accommodation – must also provide access to goods and services, but the standard is lower for structural access. Buildings housing private businesses must make access changes unless doing so was not “readily achievable”. The degree of access that must be provided depends on the resources the business has at its disposal. For example, a small family owned business would not be required to make the same effort and expense as a large corporate chain.

Under the ADA and the State Building Code, all new construction must be accessible.

## **What does this mean for me?**

Our sample was not randomly drawn. Even if it were, you could not expect the accessibility of places in your community to necessarily be the same as the average accessibility perceived by our sample across 90 different Connecticut communities. But this information can still offer you some guidance. It may be useful to know that in transactions involving many of life’s necessities – food, finances, health care, pharmaceuticals – most Connecticut citizens with disabilities are finding venues that are receptive to their needs. You should not have to settle for less from other locations where you seek these kinds of services.

Among other places – including vitally important public institutions such as the library, town hall, public parks, and post offices--there seems to be wide variation from community to community. If you find yourself in a community with full accessibility in a venue that is important to you, be sure to let those in authority know how much this means to you. (If you find accessible and inclusive child care, offer an enthusiastic round of applause. In the perceptions of our sample, that is like finding a four-leafed clover.)

If you find inadequate accessibility in any location that is important to you, communicate with someone in authority. Each manager of a store, park, dentist's office, or community center is juggling budgets and priorities. Hearing from citizens like you could help to push improving accessibility up higher on the list of priorities. Visiting other communities to see how various public and private institutions have taken strides toward accessibility may also help you to advocate and make suggestions. If you get in touch with us, we can help you to identify other communities to visit.

For more information about the University of Connecticut's A. J. Pappanikou Center on Developmental Disabilities, or the Real Choice System Change project, please visit our website, <http://www.uconnucedd.org/>. Or call us at (860) 679-1500.