

Real Choice Systems Change Grant Project

Grant Application from the City of New Haven

City of New Haven Community Description

The City Of New Haven established the Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities and the Commission on Disabilities to promote inclusion, access, support services and information dissemination for persons with disabilities. The Department and the Commission are active and vital components of the disability community. The Department's main goal is to ensure city programs and services are accessible to persons with disabilities and that interests of New Haven's residents with disabilities are represented and their voices are heard at every level of government. Traditionally, the Department's efforts have focused on the disability community at large, including statewide initiatives.

A comprehensive study on the disability community in New Haven was commissioned by the Department in 1999 and was conducted the research firm Center for Public Policy. The study showed that 25.7% of New Haven's population identified themselves as having a disability. Of those with a disability, 28.8% were employed and two thirds of all respondents suggest they are very or somewhat satisfied with life. Regrettably 47.3% suggest their disability prevents them from getting around to church, sport events, or socializing. With this information in hand, many community leaders inside and outside of City government have sought to improve community opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Children

Children make up the smallest percentage of persons with disabilities in New Haven but often need the most attention to ensure self-worth, a quality education and adaptive life skills. The State of Connecticut provides excellent birth to three services. Unfortunately there are less resources and services for children ages three to five years of age. Infoline currently list childcare providers but gives no indication whether the providers have experience with children with disabilities. The Department will

encourage providers with the necessary skill sets for serving children with disabilities to identify themselves to Infoline and the Department.

In 2001 the Department working with the Board of Education started a pilot program to provide after-school activities to youths with disabilities ages 12-18 that could not care for themselves after school. This allowed many parents to maintain their employment.

Unfortunately, private inclusive after-school programs have recently been cut do to funding by some local non-profits. This will continue to be a problem for the foreseeable future. The Department strongly encourages all remaining after-school programs to provide full access to their services for kids with disabilities and supplies information and technical resources to them for the provision of inclusive services.

Education

Recently the New Haven's Board of Education staff specializing in the areas related to children with disabilities, including Dr. Reginald Mayo, Superintendent of Schools, made a presentation to the Commission on Disabilities on the inclusiveness of New Haven's educational system. The Board of Education seeks to provide unified educational opportunities for children with disabilities. New Haven has the highest number of students involved in inclusive educational activities, up to 80%, when compared to other urban districts. Numerous renovation projects are underway at many New Haven schools. All renovation projects include barrier removal and integration elements to provide integrated educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

The Board of Education runs a Vocational Work Experience Program for which teachers refer students to provide students with disabilities essential work experience. Currently there are 20 work sites available, with transportation and a job coach provided. Additionally there is a program to train students to become Certified Nurses Assistants and an off-campus program that focuses on transition and life skills as well as supports a commercial food service. The Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities provided encouragement and support on these grant applications, which were funded.

The Department works in cooperation with the ADA Coordinators from Yale University, Gateway Community College, and Southern Connecticut State University. These associations have resulted in:

- A student fellow intern placement from Yale University to the Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities. This energetic gentleman with disabilities developed the Disability Resource Guide;
- Locating community resources for students with disabilities who study at Gateway and SCSU;
- Working on grant efforts together along with the New Haven Regional Workforce Development Board.

Transportation

New Haven has a public transportation system composed of buses, trains, and airport, which are all wheelchair accessible. All bus service is provided by Connecticut Transit and includes 100% wheelchair accessible buses. The City of New Haven also has a downtown electric trolley system which is operated by the Greater New Haven Transit District. The trolleys are wheelchair accessible. My Ride is the paratransit service offered to New Haven residents with disabilities.

Housing

The Department has served on the “Continuum of Success” which is group composed of community support providers who work with the Housing Authority of New Haven. Efforts by this group have developed Section 8 project-based supported housing opportunities for persons with co-occurring disabilities. Advocacy efforts on behalf of the Commission on Disabilities and the Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities have prompted HANH (Housing Authority of New Haven) to re-evaluate their waiting list procedure for persons with disabilities, survey all of their accessible units to ensure that persons who need the accessible units are utilizing the units, and provided information to landlords on tax credits on making private housing accessible. Our Department is hosting as a co-sponsor, a Housing Resources Forum in partnership with HANH and DSS to train case managers on housing resources in New Haven.

Our Department has looked outside the local housing authority to all subsidized housing in the area to provide accessible housing for persons with disabilities. We have provided housing assistance resources to persons with disabilities and have sought a systemic change to the way in which HUD provides resources and information on its programs to its consumers. We requested through the Freedom of Information Act, identification of federally subsidized housing with wheelchair and sensory impairment modifications as required by the regulations for the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Since our initial request HUD headquarters has begun to identify accessible housing funded through their programs. The second phase of the project is to make the information available on the HUD website. (See Attached)

The City Of New Haven spends \$1.4 million each year, more than any other town in the state to address the 200 homeless individuals sheltered each and every day. It is estimated more than 40% of those individuals are persons with psychiatric disabilities. The city's Community Services Administration has been very involved in local and state efforts of supportive housing for this population with disabilities.

The Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities works with housing developers, providers and landlords to increase the amount and quality of accessible housing in New Haven for persons with disabilities.

Recreation

East Shore Park is the home of Hannah's Dream, which is a 30,000 square foot accessible playground in New Haven. The City Of New Haven was instrumental in supporting this effort by providing land and funding. Many other recreation facilities operated by the City are accessible for persons with disabilities. The Children's Museum also in New Haven is wheelchair accessible and offers inclusive activities for children. As mentioned earlier, The International Festival of Arts and Ideas has been an avid supporter of our Department's inclusion efforts. It has not only welcomed our participation, but has celebrated our participation with support that included grant monies to offset the cost of participating in their events.

As well, our Department hosted an audio conference for area arts and cultural organizations on accessibility of temporary cultural events. The conference topic was on making temporary and outdoor events accessible. Each attendee received a workbook that complimented the conference on accessibility and inclusion planning.

The Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities is also currently working with the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Trees to develop an inclusive summer recreation program. The grant funds would build technical capacity for that department and the purchase of durable adaptive recreational equipment and more fully involve youths as volunteer partners to the youths with disabilities, which very often turns into friendships beyond the summer. We will be working with Southern Connecticut State University with their therapeutic recreation department to recruit and develop student internships in order to sustain grant efforts.

Employment

The Director of the Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities serves on the Easter Seals Business Advisory Council which is designed to promote employment of people with disabilities. We have also worked on three grant applications with the One Stop Job Center in New Haven on grant opportunities for persons with disabilities.

The Department is also organizing Disability Mentoring Day for this October. The program seeks to encourage people with disabilities to seek employment, fosters connections for employers on being more open to hire people with disabilities and provide a network for people with disabilities to access contact that may lead to employment opportunities.

Healthcare

Yale New Haven Hospital, Hospital of St. Raphael, Hill Health Care, and Connecticut Mental Health Care are all located in New Haven. With regard to consumer satisfaction of these resources, the 1999 Disability Study notes, “The highest positive rating was recorded for accessibility to health care facilities (53.2%).”

Social Networks-Support

Many social organizations inherently work with people with disabilities given the size and diversity of New Haven’s disability community. Organizations which provide social networks support for persons with disabilities who live in New Haven are the Center for Disability Rights, The Connecticut Self Help Network, and the New Haven chapter of National Alliance for the Mentally (NAMI).

Public Attitudes and Awareness

Attitudes towards persons with disabilities are one of the hardest barriers to break and the one barrier that this Department and the Commission has been focused on eliminating in New Haven. In the 1999 Disability Survey respondents were asked how they were treated after people learn they have a disability. The following table depicts the percent of disabled respondents believing they are treated in each of the ways presented:

Treat you as an equal:	61.0%
Act as if sorry for you	29.7%
Shy away from further contact	23.8%

Targeting the elimination of this barrier will be a continued focus of this Department and will play a central role in fostering inclusion of people with disabilities.

Participation in Civic/Religious Organizations

As stated previously, the 1999 Disability Survey results show that nearly half of all respondents, 47.3% suggest that their disability prevents them from getting around to such things as cultural or sports events, church, and socializing. Nationally that number is 69%, signaling the effective inclusion of people with disabilities in New Haven. Ultimately, we need to do more to ensure that a significantly smaller percentage of people with disabilities feel excluded from their community.

Other Local Efforts

Police Training - The Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities provides training to all 450 New Haven officers on ADA requirements, nature of the New Haven disability community, etiquette and disability issues. The Director is a Certified Law Enforcement Instructor.

Web-Site Policy development – The City has developed a City policy on website accessibility for City run websites.

Emergency Preparedness Task Force - Our Department participates in a Task Force to insure that the disability community is taken into account during the City's emergency disaster planning which includes: evacuation planning, information dissemination and vaccine programs for persons with disabilities, especially those with communication barriers.

Voting - Kristin Barber, a Certified Access Monitor from the Department has reviewed all voting sites and all city funded homeless shelters for accessibility. Eighty percent of the disability community suggests they are registered to vote, according to the 1999 Disability Study and 73.8% voted in the previous election according to our 1999 Disability Survey.

Public Meetings - All Mayor's Night Out monthly events in the community are at sites which have been assessed by our department, for wheelchair accessibility. A sign language interpreter is available at every Mayor's Night Out and at all other major City events.

Statewide Efforts

Hate Crimes Task Force - The Director of the Department served on the Task Force to work on revising state statute to include disability in the state's hate crimes statute.

Disability Rights Legislation - The Director of the Department also worked vigorously on legislation including An Act Regarding the Preservation of Disability Rights which seeks to include principles of the ADA in state statute. This legislation will make state law require public entities to be accessible to people with disabilities.

Description of Proposed Task Force Implementation

As one can see from the Task Force list, there is a wide array of people and organizations that are currently invested and have information and resources necessary for an inclusion effort for persons with disabilities across a lifespan.

As rightly stated within the grant application:

“An inclusive community is one that maximizes or eliminates barriers to full participation. Persons with disabilities may need additional supports from the community in advising them about what is available and accessible within their community.”

One of the objectives of the Task Force will be to contribute to the quarterly newsletter containing events and opportunities that are inclusive, barrier free and welcoming to persons with disabilities across a lifespan. The newsletter will report on religious, cultural, employment, recreational, housing, retail, and service benefits available to the entire New Haven community. The Task Force will meet as a full group on a quarterly basis, one month, before the anticipated publication of the quarterly newsletter. The Assistant Coordinator along with student interns of the Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities, will organize the group efforts, ensure minutes, agenda's and follow through on the newsletter and related projects. Meetings will take place at the New Haven City Hall, which is accessible. Parking will be paid for by the grant, as well accommodations such as a sign language interpreter, and childcare for the parent with young children. All of the individuals on the proposed Task Force have e-mail and newsletter articles will be forwarded to the Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities, who will be responsible for composing the newsletter and getting it to print and mail. Emphasis on language usage and terminology regarding disabilities will take place for all newsletter contributors.

Another objective of the Task Force will be to work in collaboration to make systemic changes to the information that is already available to the community at large. The Department has received favorable responses when inquiring about including information about accessibility within the following public information systems such as newspaper advertisements, brochures, and databases, etc.

- INFOLINE- The information is already available regarding childcare providers who have experience with children with disabilities. However, this information is not included in the data base search information;
- INFOLINE- Information as to whether service providers are accessible could be added to the survey information and indicated along with language, TTY, information, which is currently available;
- Summer Youth Services. The city publishes a directory of summer events, which could be enhanced to indicate which events are accessible;
- New Haven Register Advertisements. After conversation with Jim Brewster, he has committed to speaking with his sales representatives about approaching retailers, who advertise about placing the accessible symbol in their ads, when appropriate. He immediately, without hesitation, understood the advantages to these retailers and offered to bring this concept to his sales representatives.

This same concept can be used in the yellow pages of telephone books, and our local telephone company, SNET, can be approached. The Department believes the Task Force can quickly think of other ways to get information out to our community. For example, although churches are not required to be accessible to people with disabilities, many of them voluntarily do so. A list of churches that are accessible could also be made available through the newsletter.

These are but a few of the ideas that are extremely feasible within existing systems and resources. They are also the types of systemic changes that are sustainable long term. It is anticipated that the Task Force will generate its own ideas once collaboration begins. For example, there is a need for Personal Care Attendants. The newsletter could advertise this need and could coordinate those efforts with the Regional Work Force Board. Then through collaboration, persons interested in the opportunity could be trained either through RWFB or Small Business Initiates for the City Of New Haven on how to start and Limited Liability Company and work for themselves. Training might also be offered in collaboration with other groups such the public school system that is currently running a grant to train students to become

Certified Nursing Assistants. With some additional training, such as how to promote independence and foster choice, these students could start their own business as personal care attendants.

Although the Department sees quarterly meetings of the Task Force with the objective of writing a newsletter, the goal is on community inclusion, and it is anticipated that projects between the Task Force members taking place as a result of their mutual interest. In summary, the Task Force is well rounded and representative of addressing the needs of people with disabilities throughout their lifespan.

Primary Challenges Facing New Haven

The total population of New Haven is 123,626. The median age is 29.3 years. Eleven percent of the population is under the age of 21, 66.9% are 21 years or over, 11.9% are 62 years and over, 10.2% are 65 years and over. Households with individuals under 18 years are 33.4% and with individual 65 years and over are 20.2%. Seventy and four tenths percent of the occupied housing units are renter occupied and 30% percent of the housing is subsidized. From a study prepared for the Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities by The Center for Research and Public Policy the following estimates were made:

Based on a study conducted by the National Organization on Disability (N.O.D) it is estimated that 20% of the nation's population is disabled. In New Haven, based on the 1999 New Haven Disability Study, the estimate is 26%.

Based on 2000 Census Bureau for New Haven County, 10.5% of the non-institutionalized population from 5-20 years old, 21.4 % of the non-institutionalized population 21-64 years old, and 44.9% of the non-institutionalized population over 65 are persons with a disability.

The income levels, among New Haven's disabled, while very low, appear to be the same as disabled residents nationally. In New Haven, 32% have incomes less than \$15,000 annually. Nationally it is 34%. A smaller percent of New Haven residents with disabilities (47.3%), than national survey respondents (69%), suggest their disability prevents them from getting around to church, sport events, or socializing.

The challenges facing New Haven are old housing stock, and the lack of money. Forty five and two tenths percent of the total households in New Haven are paying more than 30% of their income on housing. Within the city of New Haven, 52.1% of the population is living on a fixed income, either Social Security. Supplemental Security Income, Public Assistance or Retirement Income, according to 2000 Census.

Although there are some newly renovated apartment buildings, accessible/affordable rental units are far out of range for persons with disabilities living on benefits from public sources. Unless these units are subsidized, they are too expensive for most people with disabilities. The disability community also

has to compete for public housing with persons who are non-disabled low income. According to the 1999 New Haven Disability Survey, only 25.7% positively reported access to convenient housing, 25.7% positively reported access to affordable housing for disabled residents.

New Haven's community has an above average number of individuals with disabilities residing in the City, spends more on homeless shelters than any other city in Connecticut, and is reliant upon state and federal dollars to assist in the support of its community at a time when these supports are being cut.

Plan for Using Funding and Project Support

Task Force: The funds will help defray the cost of participation of the Task Force members and pay for accommodations. As mentioned earlier, the Department assumes the projects of the Task Force, through its support staff from the Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities, will go far beyond that of a newsletter. It is anticipated that members of the Task Force will be interested in sustaining their involvement once a non-profit entity is developed through the City.

Newsletter: A quarterly newsletter is the initial product of the efforts of the Task Force and this grant, which can later be sustained through mainstreamed communication, such as newspapers. As well, it is feasible to approach business to provide the funds for a quarterly insert in local papers, especially if a non-profit entity was formed and business could donate funds. The City also intends to post the newsletter on the City's website in an accessible format for persons with all types of disabilities to access.

ADACC Consultation: A key element to inclusion is providing access. This grant will enable the Department to assess places of public accommodations, such as restaurants, theatres, shops and recreation areas, to assess and promote real access for persons with disabilities. Although one of the Department staff is a certified access monitor, evaluation of Title III entities would best be managed by an access monitor from the ADA Coalition of Connecticut. Money is in the proposed budget for this service, as well as consultation to the Task Force.

Establish a Non-Profit: The establishment of the non-profit would enable the Task Force and the Department to access private foundation and local resources for funding projects further promoting inclusion and public awareness, such as producing the video "If You Only Knew What I was Thinking". Private donations could also be used to sustain the efforts of the Disability Mentoring Day.

Legal Fees: There is a one time only line item for attorney's fees for services needed regarding establishment of the non-profit and copyrighting of materials to enable distribution of proprietary materials, including the video on inclusion.

Disability Mentoring Day: A small portion of the grant funds would be used in the first three years to offset the cost of accommodations, transportation, and meals, as the Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities will be coordinating local efforts on this project.

Part Time Student Intern: The Department intends to use a part time student intern throughout the grant and beyond the three year grant cycle to organize the Task Force, help develop the newsletter and work with the various entities involved in promoting community inclusion.

Newspaper Inserts: The focus of the Department and the Commission has been awareness. In an effort to increase awareness to the greatest number of individuals in the New Haven area a newspaper insert on disability issues and resources appears to be an effective way to accomplish this. The insert will be up to four pages with articles and information for the disabled and non-disabled community. Publication of this insert is intended to coincide with the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Disability Awareness Day on July 26.