



Focus Group Report

HOUSING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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Rhodes to Independence, 2005

*Rhodes to Independence operates under the auspices of
the University of Rhode Island College of Pharmacy*

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INTRODUCTION

Rhodes to Independence is committed to making systems changes to facilitate the competitive employment of people with disabilities through building and coordinating supports, reducing barriers to independence and enhancing self-empowerment. Launched in 2000, Rhodes to Independence operates under the auspices of the University of Rhode Island College Of Pharmacy.

Representatives from public and private sectors including state agencies, non-profit organizations, businesses, educators, legislators and consumers collaborate through an oversight committee known as the Rhodes to Independence Steering Committee. In 2004, the Steering Committee recommended the implementation of a Housing Workgroup.

The goal of the Rhodes to Independence Housing Workgroup is to construct sustainable system changes that will remove barriers preventing Rhode Islanders with disabilities from residing in the community or housing arrangement of their choice.

In 2005, the Rhodes to Independence Housing Workgroup, consisting of housing and disability organization and agency professionals, implemented the goal to conduct a qualitative study to reach a better understanding of housing-related issues for Rhode Islanders with disabilities. The objectives of this study included gathering information on housing barriers for Rhode Islanders with disabilities and gaining insight into recommendations to increase opportunities

for people with disabilities to live in the community or housing arrangement of their choice.

The following Executive Summary is a brief synopsis of the focus groups including an overview of the methodology, highlights from the findings section of the report and recommendations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

People with disabilities want to live independently in the community or housing arrangement of their choice. In order to meet this housing goal, they need affordable and accessible housing, as well as access to the necessary supports and services.

In 2005, the Rhodes to Independence Housing Workgroup, consisting of housing and disability organization and agency professionals, implemented the goal to conduct a qualitative study to reach a better understanding of housing-related issues for Rhode Islanders with disabilities.

Methodology Overview

The two focus groups were held in 2005. The Rhodes to Independence Housing Workgroup staff member conducted the research which involved two focus groups.

The sample included a total of twenty seven participants. The first focus group, the **Leadership Group**, consisted of 12 participants who provide direction on issues relating to housing on the individual, community, organization, state and national levels. The second focus group, the **Consumer Group**, included 15 individuals who either have a disability or are a family member of a person with a disability.

The focus groups were recorded with consent from the participants, and transcripts from the tapes were prepared by professional transcribers. The

dialogue from each focus group was reviewed, coded into categories and characterized into themes. Patterns and themes across both groups were noted and illustrative quotes were identified for use in this report.

Highlights of Findings

This section contains highlights of the key points identified in the findings section of this report.

Barriers to Housing

The participants expressed concern about a number of barriers to housing for people with disabilities including state-wide housing systems barriers; negative attitudes; lack of affordable, accessible and available housing; the need for increased support services and education. Some of the key observations of the groups are noted below.

State-wide Housing System

The participants felt that the housing system was fragmented and the navigation of this system was a major barrier.

- ❖ The disconnect between housing agencies or organizations and community or disability support services was reported as a critical barrier in both focus groups.
 - In order to live independently in the community, people with disabilities need to receive housing assistance and community or disability support services at the same time. For example, it was felt that the current housing system “does not look beyond

housing” and overlooks the necessary community or support services needed for individuals to live independently (e.g., housing on a bus line).

- ❖ Participants shared that the lack of a “central location” of available and accessible housing was another major barrier.
 - There was a feeling among the participants that some housing agencies do not want to provide the necessary information needed for a centralized database.
 - The participants spoke of housing agencies that do not want to “give up their secrets” and that are working in “silo;” not aware of what other agencies are doing.
 - Concern was expressed about access issues for individuals who are Deaf due to a lack of TTY’s or an understanding of the use of the RI Relay System by housing agency/organization staff.
 - Individuals who are newly disabled were identified as having increased frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed in navigating the housing system.
 - Individuals with disabilities who are homeless are faced with multiple additional barriers throughout the homeless system because shelters are not fully accessible and housing service providers are not prepared to meet their needs.

- The absence of clear guidelines that define accessibility features throughout the housing system and the availability of the housing agency paperwork in alternative formats were also identified barriers.

Societal Attitudes

Discrimination exists toward people with disabilities living in middle to upper income neighborhoods or the community of their choice.

- ❖ One community created enough opposition that neighbors picketed and burned items on the lawn of a home where an individual with a disability resided.
- ❖ Neighborhoods in the state have actively expressed their feelings that people with disabilities or families with children who have disabilities are not welcome in the community.
 - It was felt by participants that some communities feel that if children with special needs attend school and receive special education it will take away funding for activities such as a high school football team.
- ❖ A political climate in some areas of the state fosters a reluctance to develop additional subsidized housing which impacts the options for people with disabilities.

- ❖ Some town or city housing decision makers (e.g., zoning and planning boards) have taken steps to prevent people with disabilities from living in the community.
- ❖ Some communities have actively organized against the development of a group home in their neighborhood.

Available, Affordable and Accessible Housing

There was an overall agreement among participants that there is a lack of available, affordable and accessible housing for people with disabilities.

- ❖ There are not enough housing options for people with disabilities and when housing does become available it is not always accessible, affordable and located in a safe environment. The housing options may have one or two of these factors (accessible, affordable, safe) but very rarely do they have all three.
- ❖ There is a need to increase accessible housing residential areas to limit high rise living for people with disabilities.
 - Participants expressed concern that due to the lack of housing options, people with disabilities often have inadequate housing choices that result in a great many younger people having to reside in complexes for the elderly where “the lifestyle of a 20 year old is very different than that of a senior citizen.”

- However, a few participants identified the positive aspects of living in these complexes such as additional support services, accessibility features and increased housing opportunities.
- ❖ Subsidized housing for people with disabilities has minimal turnover and when slots do become available, they are filled immediately.
- ❖ There was strong concern expressed by participants that affordability of rent and home ownership was a key barrier to housing for people with disabilities.
 - The difficulty for people who are collecting SSI payments to live in housing that is not subsidized was expressed as a concern.
 - The participants felt that there needs to be an increase in rent subsidized programs and programs that support homeownership.
- ❖ Participants shared feelings that the ideal housing environment for people with disabilities is housing that is built to meet individual needs but this is not the case unless people are building their own homes which can be very expensive.

Home Modifications

In discussing the accessibility of homes, the participants said that the issue of home modifications, including the need for more funding to make housing environments accessible, was a critical barrier to housing.

- ❖ There was concern expressed by participants that the lack of home modification funds was a critical barrier.
- ❖ The current waiting list for home modification funding is very long. This has resulted in some people with disabilities having to be carried into their homes or not having easy access to kitchens, bathrooms or bedrooms.
- ❖ Some people with disabilities make too much money to qualify for home modification funding but cannot afford the cash out of pocket for accessible modifications.
- ❖ Due to the lack of accessible home modification opportunities, the participants felt that even if they could afford to purchase a home, they could not afford to make it accessible.
- ❖ Concern was also expressed that there was a lack of awareness among property managers and landlords about the legal requirements to make accessibility modifications.
- ❖ It was felt that people with disabilities are viewed as “expensive tenants” due to the need for home modifications. This view often limits their housing choices.
- ❖ Concern was also shared about the need for more immediate home modification funds for people who are newly disabled.

Family Support Services

There are limited housing choices for people with cognitive and developmental disabilities as they age.

- ❖ Substantial concerns were expressed about the need for increased support services for family members.
 - There is a tremendous shortage of support staff available to assist families.
 - Family members shared feelings of anxiety, concern and fear as to where their adult children with disabilities will live when they (the parents) become ill or die.
 - Family members feel that this population of adults with disabilities is not considered a housing priority and an incorrect assumption is often made that “they will just be taken care of” by family members without any understanding of the need for future housing planning.

Education and Awareness

The lack of education and awareness of the many issues of housing and disability was identified as a critical barrier.

- ❖ It was felt among the Consumer Group that there is a system-wide misperception of disability and housing that is transmitted from the housing agency or organization down to the landlord or property manager.

- Concern was expressed that housing agency and organization staff do not have an understanding of the housing rights of people with disabilities or their needs.
- It was felt that landlords, managers and realtors have ignored and disregarded the rights for fair housing.
- Attitudes by landlords, managers and realtors toward specific types of disabilities were also identified as a barrier to housing. For example, participants expressed concern about the misconceptions related to falsely assumed danger of individuals who have mental illness and people who are Deaf; as well as perceptions that people with disabilities lack the abilities to live independently.

Consumer Advocacy

The participants in the Leadership Group felt that a lack of consumer advocacy skills was a barrier to the individual with a disability.

- ❖ The participants felt that there was a lack of awareness among people with disabilities of the resources available to determine housing options.
- ❖ A lack of awareness and understanding among young people with disabilities about how to manage finances is resulting in a barrier to obtaining housing opportunities.

- ❖ The participants expressed concern that people with disabilities are not advocating for their housing rights and opportunities.

Participants' Suggestions

The participants also shared their ideas of ways to increase housing opportunities for people with disabilities. Their suggestions encompassed a variety of themes which are identified in the Findings section of the report. In addition, some of these ideas are incorporated in this report's formal recommendations. Some of the key observations of the groups when asked to share one thing to do differently or in a better way to increase housing opportunities for people with disabilities are highlighted below:

- ❖ *Have a one-stop location that would list all of the available properties out there plus all of the steps of how you make this happen.*
- ❖ *Have a central clearing house for accessible housing information.*
- ❖ *Having a universal application process in place for anyone that is looking for subsidized Section 8 housing.*
- ❖ *We need to look at creating a new registry system.*
- ❖ *Increase the number of available, accessible housing options.*
- ❖ *Work with Habitat for Humanity or develop something similar for people with disabilities.*
- ❖ *Increase home modifications funds and broaden requirements.*
- ❖ *More support to families with children with disabilities.*
- ❖ *Raise awareness and education through affiliations such as Housing Works, Statewide Planning and other organizations.*

- ❖ *Educate people who work in housing agencies and organizations. We need to educate landlords, property managers and realtors*
- ❖ *Change attitudes in society toward housing for people with disabilities.*
- ❖ *Eliminate housing discrimination for people with disabilities and their families.*
- ❖ *In a perfect world, we would have affordable, accessible housing with the supports needed for all people with disabilities. Maybe it can become a reality if we all work together.*

The comments from the focus group participants suggested a number of areas that have the potential to positively impact housing opportunities for people with disabilities. Their suggestions encompassed a variety of themes which are located in the detailed findings section of the report. Also, some of these ideas are incorporated in this report's formal recommendations.

Recommendations

The comments from the focus group participants suggested a number of areas that have the potential to positively impact housing opportunities for people with disabilities.

State-wide Housing System

- ***Central Database*** - Implement a central Rhode Island Accessible Housing Registry that includes public and private housing as well as privately operated subsidized housing.
- ***Housing Policy*** - Develop a policy brief on the housing issues pertaining to people with disabilities that would address topics such as program and service accommodations, accessibility requirements, legal rights and

responsibilities. This brief could be distributed across the housing continuum including emergency shelters, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, permanent housing, supportive services and crisis intervention including outreach assessment and referral.

- ***Collaborative Integration***- Initiate a forum in which key housing agencies and organizations such as the Housing Resources Commission and HousingWorks can discuss state-wide options to integrate policies, regulations and funding sources for housing and support services for people with disabilities.
- ***Communication Strategy***- Develop a communication strategy to streamline information to bridge the gaps among agencies, consumers and other partners.
- ***Coordination of Services***- Develop an action plan for coordination of services and increased collaborations to enhance partnerships among the organizations that provide housing and support services.
- ***Accessibility Standardization***- Develop policy for the standardization of the definition of housing “accessibility” to be used throughout the housing system.
- ***Frequently Asked Questions Fact Sheet***- Develop a Frequently Asked Questions fact sheet that identifies disability-specific housing questions and answers for individuals who are unfamiliar with the housing system including people who are homeless or newly disabled.

- ***Programs and Services Fact Sheet:*** Develop an informational fact sheet on housing programs and disability serviced throughout the state.

Available, Affordable and Accessible Housing

- ***Integration of Disability:*** Establish a mechanism to ensure affordable and accessible housing for people with disabilities are an integral part of the state wide initiatives such as the Five Year Housing Strategic Plan, Consolidated Plan, HousingWorks Policy Platform, Neighborhood Opportunities Program and other state housing initiatives.
- ***Measurements:*** Conduct periodic measurements to assess the degree to which the implementation of housing programs and policies are addressing housing issues of people with disabilities.
- ***Action Plan:*** Develop action strategies to enhance state-wide efforts to assure that housing rights are being appropriately implemented.
- ***Technical Assistance & Guidance:*** Collaborate with the Governor's Commission on Disabilities to offer technical assistance and guidance on fair housing regulations, legal rights and responsibilities.
- ***Rights & Responsibilities:*** Support the Disability Law Center in providing information to people with disabilities about their housing rights and responsibilities.
- ***Universal Application:*** Develop a subsidized housing application to be used throughout the state.

- **Housing Strategy for Young Adults**- Develop a strategy to examine additional housing opportunities for young people with disabilities outside of complexes for the elderly.

Home Modifications

- **Home Modifications Loan Program**- Develop legislation for a Home Modifications Loan Program for Individuals with Disabilities (similar to Massachusetts) to provide loans for modifications to a homeowner who has a disability, has a household member who has a disability (or rents to an individual with a disability). The goal of the program is for people with disabilities to live independently in their communities.
- **Program Information**- Develop relevant program information and materials to be widely distributed throughout the state.

Societal Attitudes

- **Awareness & Sensitivity Program**- Offer a two hour seminar program for town and city housing decision makers to educate and sensitize them about current issues and environment of housing for people with disabilities.
- **Public Relations Campaign** - Initiate a state wide public relations campaign that raises awareness of housing for diverse populations including people with disabilities and their families.

Family Support Services

- ***Central Clearinghouse*** Develop a central clearinghouse to coordinate resources, services, accommodations and technology to assist families with the housing needs of adult children with disabilities.

Raise Awareness

- ***Accommodations*** – There is a need to overcome the prevailing belief on the part of many landlords and property managers that accommodations are very expensive. Provide a training seminar to address the various accommodations and the limited cost of most accommodations.
- ***Perceptions of People with Disabilities*** – Many property managers, landlords and realtors the disability and are not able to understand the implications of different disabilities and the varying skills and abilities possessed by people with disabilities. This is another training opportunity that can be addressed.
- ***Attitudes*** – Provide sensitivity training to housing agency staff employers to increase understanding of the importance of providing housing opportunities for people with disabilities.
- ***Resource Dissemination*** – The importance of resource dissemination strongly suggests the need for the Rhodes to Independence website to include extensive links to other sites that provide housing options and services for people with disabilities.

Consumer Advocacy

- ***Skills Model:*** Develop a housing skills model to identify information/skills needed to empower people with disabilities to advocate for their housing needs and provide housing advocacy training sessions.
- ***Networking-*** People with disabilities should be encouraged to openly and regularly let others know that they are seeking housing. Underlying this approach may be the need to provide training and education to people with disabilities that teaches and demonstrates effective networking skills.
- ***Training Module-*** Develop a training module on housing transition to be utilized by high school educators working with students with disabilities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As noted previously, the purpose of this research was to reach a better understanding of housing-related issues for Rhode Islanders with disabilities. The objectives of this study included gathering information on housing barriers for Rhode Islanders with disabilities and gaining insight into recommendations to enhance opportunities for people with disabilities to live in the community or housing arrangement of their choice.

The following will review the research methodology and detailed findings.

Methodology

This section reviews the methods and procedures selected for this study including the sample, recruitment strategies, group procedures, data analysis and research limitations.

Sample

The sample included a total of twenty seven participants. The first focus group, the **Leadership Group**, consisted of twelve participants who represent agencies or organizations that provide direction or advocacy on issues relating to housing on the individual, community, organization, state and national levels or disability organizations that provide information for housing.

The second focus group, the **Consumer Group**, included fifteen individuals who either have a disability or are a family member of a person with a disability. This sample included thirteen individuals with disabilities and two parents of adults with disabilities.

In addition, the participants represented a cross section of disabilities including mobility, hearing, visual, developmental, learning, mental illness and chronic illness.

Recruitment

The researcher, with the assistance of the Housing Workgroup, established an initial list of suggested participants for the Leadership and Consumer Groups. Representatives from homeless agencies were identified and contacted for recommendations of individuals who were homeless or residing in transitional housing.

The researcher made an initial contact to recommended participants to assess level of interest and availability. The researcher sent follow up confirmation letters to those who agreed to participate with a reminder of date, location and time.

Location

The location of the focus groups was the Radisson Airport Hotel in Warwick, Rhode Island. This location was identified due to its accessibility and central location in the state.

Group Procedures

The focus groups each lasted 2 hours. At the beginning of each focus group, the participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose to not respond to a question or to withdraw from the focus group at anytime. Permission to tape record the focus groups was granted

by the participants for the purpose of retaining their comments for the analysis of the data. The researcher assured the participants that their comments would be kept confidential. The researcher developed and followed the focus group protocol (see Appendix A).

An assistant was available to assist the researcher at each focus group with greeting participants, assisting with refreshments (breakfast and dinner buffets) and the management of recording tapes.

The Consumer Group participants received a \$50 gift certificate to Barnes and Noble for their involvement in the research. The Leadership Group, consisting of many state employees, did not receive honoraria.

The transcripts from the tapes were prepared by a professional transcriber.

Data Analysis

The data was organized by transcribing the tape recordings into written text. The dialogue from each focus group was reviewed and coded into categories. Using the identified categories, the information was then organized and characterized into themes. The Leadership and Consumer group transcripts were analyzed separately. Patterns and themes across both groups were noted and illustrative quotes were identified for use in this report.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Introduction

This section will present the findings of the data collected including characteristics of the sample and responses to questions. A description of the participants is included to provide a context for the data collected. The results of the focus group questions are reported by direct quote of select respondents' answers to the questions.

Characteristics of the Sample

The research included a sample of twenty seven participants. This section presents the type of housing agency or organization represented and the respondents' types of housing experiences.

Leadership Group

The Leadership group, consisted of twelve participants who represent agencies or organizations that provide direction or advocacy on issues relating to housing on the individual, community, organization, state and national levels or disability organizations that provide information for housing.

Table 1 displays the characteristics of the sample including the type of organization/agency represented.

Table 1. Agency or Organization Represented

<i>Agency/Organization Type</i>	<i>Participants</i>
Homeless	2
Transitional/Supportive Housing	2
Home Modifications	2
Home Ownership	2
Housing Across Continuum <i>(Homelessness to Home Ownership)</i>	2
Disability Agency	2

Consumer Group

The second focus group, the Consumer Group, included fifteen individuals who either have a disability or are a family member of a person with a disability. This sample included thirteen people with disabilities and two parents of adults with disabilities. Table 2 provides the housing experiences of the participants.

Table 2. Housing Experiences of Participants

Housing Experience	Participants
Homeless	1
Transitional Housing	1
Supportive Housing	1
Renter	3
Home Modifications	3
Nursing Home/Transition from Nursing Home	2
Home Ownership	2
Living with Family Members	2

In addition, the participants represented a cross section of disabilities including mobility, hearing, visual, developmental, learning, mental illness and chronic illness.

Results

In analyzing the focus groups and coding the respondents' answers to the questions, the following categories emerged as barriers to housing for people with disabilities: the state-wide housing system barriers, attitudinal barriers, limited affordable, available and accessible housing, the need for increased support services and consumer advocacy. The following quotes represent collectively what the majority of the participants perceived as barriers.

State-wide Housing System Barriers

The participants felt that there are multiple barriers within the state-wide housing system for people with disabilities. The common themes noted among the respondents' quotes include: difficulty in navigating the system, a lack of a centralized list of accessible housing, access barriers for people who are Deaf, newly disabled or homeless, logistics such as long waiting lists and limited communication between agencies.

Navigation of the Housing System

The participants spoke of the challenges for people with disabilities to navigate the housing system.

It's difficult for people without disabilities to navigate the housing system let alone someone who has a disability.

It is just such a tangled web because there are so many barriers within the system. OK it's an absolute mess.

The system is extremely fragmented.

I'm an educated person and still could not understand the process. There were no instructions that said "do this, this, and that." It was very nebulous. There was no one to be accountable to. It was very frustrating as a parent to not know how the system works. I kept saying "give me the paperwork, tell me how this works, I can read it and understand if you tell me," but no one has the answers.

It is very difficult, very difficult to navigate through the system.

Central Database

As the following comments indicate, participants felt that the lack of one list or central database that identifies all available accessible housing is a barrier.

We don't have one gathering place for all of the housing information. In particular, in the rental and accessibility housing market there isn't an equivalent of the MLS listing.

If you're looking for subsidized housing you have to go to one place. If you're trying to look for non-subsidized housing then you have to go to another place. And none list accessible features. There's no one entity.

It's very difficult to determine whether or not a home is accessible because there is no central place that you can go to find out if an apartment building is accessible.

Again the problem is that in Rhode Island you may have a segment of the population of disabled persons that is deaf or wheelchair users but accessibility is the one commonality for all these sub-populations. But we do not have one common place to look for accessible housing that meets our needs.

There is a tremendous need for one centralized place to house the data so we have a better picture of housing in the state for the disabled.

One organization runs a program for individuals in the shelter system and tries to find affordability housing that might be available through the Housing locator system, but what good is one list and especially a list that does not identify accessible options?

Respondents also spoke of the lack of clear guidelines for identifying accessibility features of available housing.

With the MLS Web site, if you're looking for a house you can check off a check box if you want to look for a home with "handicapped features." I'm looking for a house for myself. I was looking through that and what was amazing is that it comes back with a bunch of hits and it says, "This house has accessible handicap features." When you go to the individual listing of the house the accessible feature was low pile carpeting. Getting correct information is critical. I was expecting maybe 2 accessible condos and there were 20 that came up and that is because 19 of them had low pile carpeting. We need a clear definition of what accessibility means.

It is tough to rent or buy because there is a lack of knowledge throughout society of what accessibility means because accessibility for everyone is different.

You have to actually go to a place to see if it is accessible. There are too many different interpretations of accessibility.

The one registry that supposedly lists accessible rental properties does not identify accessibility features and it is not updated regularly.

It was felt by participants that realtors and landlords who list properties or units are not clear about accessibility guidelines.

If I said to a landlord that I need to have a wheelchair accessible house, the landlord may think I need a wheelchair shower or think I need lots of modifications. If I don't have the chance to say to him that all I need is a ramp to get in and a door that is wide enough to fit through then I am crossed off their list immediately and do not get the place.

When you talk about accessibility to realtors, what some landlords don't realize is everybody's needs are different in some aspects. Some people with disabilities might need a roll-in shower and some people might be able to navigate a tub or a bathroom with only bars.

A lot of realtors or people who are renting or selling homes will say they have an accessible house and that means that they have a ramp and that's it. Once you're in the door if you can't crawl you're not getting through the place. And that's very frustrating for the people who are out there looking.

One person's accessibility is another person's inaccessibility.

Access Barriers

According to the participants, specific populations of people with disabilities such as individuals who are Deaf or newly disabled have additional challenges to accessing the housing system.

Many state housing agencies advertise that they have a TTY. But the TTY is not anywhere in plain site, its not even physically hooked up, its in a drawer somewhere or in a closet somewhere. Let alone training the staff on how to utilize that equipment or how to properly operate a TTY or how to use the relay in lieu of having a TTY.

If someone has a newly acquired disability they don't often know the ropes and what's available and how to approach it. They find it frustrating and overwhelming.

Physicians don't know what to tell the newly disabled so people are just discharged without knowing where to get what they need.

The access issues for individuals with disabilities who are homeless were also described by respondents.

The services that our homeless providers have are more along the lines of people with serious mental health concerns and substance abuse versus someone with physical disabilities who our system does not accommodate.

It is hard to get someone from homelessness to housing and to add to that, someone with a disability. The problems multiply dramatically and once someone is living in a shelter, assuming that a person with disabilities could manage to even live in a shelter because our shelters are not accessible it becomes that much more difficult.

Homeless shelters aren't accessible. Some of them you have to leave during the day and a lot of people with disabilities can't go out and stay out all day and then just be able to come back at night.

I know people with disabilities who are living out of their cars because they can't get into shelter due to the lack of accessibility.

Sure, some shelters may have a ramp but they do not have interpreters available for the Deaf. It is very difficult to find an interpreter at the last minute in an emergency situation. I was not able to access a shelter because I had no one to communicate with the people who run and manage the shelter. And those people at the shelter did not have training or awareness on how to secure an interpreter for the person who is staying at their shelter. Should an emergency arise, there's no way for them to communicate with that person who's using their shelter and that's a real crises in Rhode Island.

The state or whoever oversees the shelters seems to push this issue under the carpet we need to talk about it. I bet we would be talking about this if someone from a housing organization or somebody who makes key decisions on housing in the state had a disability and needed to use a shelter.

Logistics

The respondents spoke of the long waiting lists and the lack of paperwork available in alternative formats.

The waiting lists are so long and the process is so arduous.

The paperwork in affordable housing is more cumbersome and the reality is that most of the population that needs the housing has a disability so add the burden of being disabled to this process of the paperwork and you can understand why people just give up.

Access is an issue for deaf people. I don't mean to speak negatively, but many deaf people have a lower literacy level in terms of reading and writing and don't know how to access services or even to navigate the delivery system so they often rely on people others to advocate for them. We need more services for people like that who can't read and write and access the system.

The paperwork throughout the system is not available in alternative formats. They have to sit and read it to you or people who are blind have been told to take it to someone to fill out for them.

Lack of Communication

The concern over a lack of communication among housing and support services as well as a disconnect among housing agencies was described by participants.

The system does not look beyond just housing. I think it is more complicated in that for some folks not only do they need to have accessible housing but they need to be close to a bus line.

We have received calls from people after they made housing choices, primarily because it is the only housing choice they had and then they suddenly discover that they can't food because they are not on a bus line and this was the only housing unit they could get into.

All of the housing agencies and organizations that provide services seem to be fighting for the same dollar and so they don't want to give up their secrets. It's as if they are working in the silo syndrome, where everyone has their one little silo of things they know but those silos are exclusive, they don't know what the other one is doing.

The system just peals off the disability piece and ignores it and deals with only the housing part for that person instead of dealing with all their needs. This sets up those individuals for other problems that nobody thought of.

The support services are being overlooked which is a very difficult problem that needs to be addressed.

There is limited communication between agencies. It seems like so many agencies are holding on to what they have and what they know. Where does that leave someone with a disability who is just trying to get through and understand how the system works?

Coordination is a very important issue. To let people know what's going on in one place to another. One organization or agency is offering a service and other organizations are duplicating that same service and often are not even aware that it exists under the auspices of another agency.

Attitudinal Barriers

The participants expressed the belief that there is evidence of discrimination toward people with disabilities living in the community of their choice. The common themes noted among the respondents' quotes include: political climate, societal reluctance, negative actions by city and town decision makers, specific disabilities, landlord and managers ignoring housing rights.

Political Climate

The impact that the political climate of attitudes in some areas of the state has on housing opportunities was also discussed by participants.

*In places like *city* there is a political climate where there is not going to be anymore subsidized housing let alone subsidized housing for the disabled.*

*Some places are very blatant. *city* for years was very upfront, they didn't want families with kids with disabilities. The biggest problem that they fought the most was families who had foster and adopted kids with special needs. They went to the point of that stirring up enough opposition that neighbors were picketing and burned stuff on the families' lawn to get them out of the neighborhood. They perceived children with special needs as the football team; that if those children go to school the school will have to close down the football team in order to have the funding for the kids education. In some communities, education is all about the football team and nothing else counts; not even kids with special needs.*

*My concern is how really resistant cities and towns are to having subsidized housing. I live in *town* and I can't tell you the number of letters to the Editor that appeared in my local newspaper. They would rather see a mall there than see subsidized housing. We're getting*

comments like, "We don't want those people out in our area." Who are those people? Based on what I have heard, those people include the disabled.

*In *city* there was another controversy in a development that the city is working on. At a public hearing the council was put to task for not include housing opportunities for people with disabilities in the project.*

Societal Reluctance

In addition, participants spoke of an overall feeling that there is reluctance to having people with disabilities living in the community of their choice.

Peoples' homes are their greatest asset for the most part, so they care desperately about preserving the value and preserving their quality of life so anything that is perceived as a threat including somebody who has a disability moving in next door. It is classicism and racism underlying the very values of property so it is a very strong attitude and prejudice that we have to overcome.

There is definitely a fair housing issue especially when it comes to the disabled. People do not want to live near the disabled. I have seen people organize to keep group homes out of the neighborhood.

It is amazing to me the negative feelings of opening up communities to be receptive of the disabled.

There is an undercurrent of trying to preserve the status quo. You see it in acreage requirements on lots and you see it around special needs students. While they may not always verbalize it, there is a lot of body language that people use with their state or local officials to try to prevent people with disabilities from moving into the area. Some people are a lot more straightforward about it than others, but there's probably a whole other layer of people who are working behind the scenes to try and unravel progress to keep them out.

Families who have children with special needs that receive special education are viewed as even more of an opposition to creating housing.

City & Town Decision Makers

Respondents shared that some town or city housing decision makers (e.g., zoning and planning boards) have taken steps to prevent people with disabilities from living in the community.

We have had years and years where municipal officials have tried to use zoning to keep families with kids with special needs out of the town.

The real target population in every community is zoning and planning board officials because they can control land use and they often discriminate on who can move in." If someone does not want the disabled living there, they can take care of it.

I was involved when there was tremendous opposition in one community for disabled individuals. We had to prove that they needed housing by actually coming up with a list of individuals with disabilities for town meetings who qualified for the housing.

Disability Specific

The participants felt that attitudes toward specific types of disabilities impact housing choices. For example, participants expressed concern about the misconceptions related to falsely assumed danger of individuals who have mental illness and people who are Deaf and perceptions that people with disabilities lack the abilities to live independently.

By and large people within society view those with mental illnesses as being violent or dangerous. The facts are that people with mental illness tend to be more a victim of crime than a perpetrator of that but many people don't know that. So, they are shunned from living in certain locations.

People often perceive individuals who are blind or visually impaired as not being able to live alone.

Generally there is a misperception that a person who can't speak must therefore be lower in intelligence or stupid and can't live on their own.

A lot of deaf people are perceived as dangerous because they're not able to hear and are turned down for housing because of it.

A lot of times landlords will have a misconception about deaf parents thinking that these parents won't be able to tend to their children properly because they can't hear. This creates a big barrier for deaf people trying to rent.

I know there are many housing barriers for people with mobility disabilities but there are also perceptual barriers as to what we can and can't do that prevent someone from living where they want too.

Because I happen to be blind, the manager, the owner of the apartment, had a certain attitude thinking because I'm blind I wouldn't be able to live there. He wasn't aware of what skills I have and that I would be perfectly capable, but this perception puts up a barrier and I did not get the apartment.

Understanding Housing Rights

Concern was expressed that landlords, managers, realtors and housing agency staff have ignored and disregarded the rights for fair housing.

Landlords are often very quick to ignore rights for fair housing and accessibility.

I know of a real estate agent who refused to hire an interpreter for a deaf potential buyer.

I am familiar with multiple instances of staff from housing agencies at different levels not being sensitive to people with disabilities. There is a feeling that the needs of the disabled are not as important just by the lack of accessibility within the offices and their approach of people with disabilities being an afterthought.

We have found managers of condominiums who think they can keep out folks by not making places accessible. They even prohibit handicap parking and a whole host of other things.

Available and Affordable Housing

The participants spoke of the lack of available and affordable housing in the state for people with disabilities. The common theme noted among the respondents' quotes was the need for more affordable housing located in safe environments.

Need for Affordable Housing

As reflected in the following comments, the participants talked about the need for more affordable housing in the state. The responses included the following comments.

There is simply not enough affordable housing units overall especially for people with any kind of special needs.

We need more affordable housing for everyone including people with disabilities in Rhode Island.

We need more rent subsidized housing for people with disabilities.

Once people have a place, they do not leave and are in the subsidized place for a long time.

Safe Housing

In addition, participants expressed concern that there is a need to address safety issues in affordable housing.

When we do have housing it is often not in an environment that is safe especially for those with disabilities.

They are pretty much on their own and fending for themselves. It's like we found you housing, sorry it is not safe but it is a roof over your head.

When a housing unit does become available, nine times out of ten it is not accessible or it is not affordable or not safe, it never seems to be all of them.

Housing Costs

Participants also spoke of the challenges that people with disabilities have affording housing especially people who receive Supplemental Security Income and are not living in subsidized housing.

People with disabilities who are not employed, who are collecting social security disability, don't have the money to be able to have their own home, especially if they can't get into subsidized housing. It is very difficult to afford housing.

The amount of money that you get from SSI is around \$635 a month and with the rents being over \$550 it is almost impossible to afford rent and utilities. It makes it almost impossible to succeed in housing unless it is subsided.

Accessible Housing

The lack of accessible housing was shared as a barrier to housing for people with disabilities. The common themes noted among the respondents' quotes include: lack of understanding of accessibility accommodations and legal responsibilities, the need for more funding options for home modifications, the trend of young people living in complexes with elderly people and the need for custom or universal designed homes.

Lack of Awareness

Concern was expressed that there was a lack of awareness among property managers and landlords about the legal requirements and expense to make accessibility modifications.

It is tough to rent or buy because there is a lack of knowledge throughout society of what accessibility means because accessibility for everyone is different.

There is just not a good connection between the people who live in the housing units and those who manage the properties. The people who manage the properties are not aware of their responsibilities by law.

Not having enough information about what various disabilities in terms of accommodation or accessibility needs is a problem for landlords.

People with disabilities are perceived as being an expensive tenant because landlords think they will have to make modifications to the apartment.

As soon as they hear the word accommodation landlords immediately think its expensive and sometimes those accommodations aren't cost prohibitive, they're not expensive, but when they hear that term that's the first thing they think.

A lot of times the landlords will perceive Deaf people as being an expensive tenant because think they will have to make modifications or accommodations to the apartment such as a visible ceiling or door device. As soon as they hear the word accommodation they immediately think its expensive and sometimes those accommodations aren't cost prohibitive, they're not expensive, but when they hear that term they only think of the expense.

Funding for Home Modifications

The participants expressed concern over the need for more home modification funding and spoke of the challenge of the income guidelines and long waiting lists of the current home modification programs in the state.

For people in wheelchairs, getting into the apartment building is half the battle. Making the individual unit accessible can be easy or complicated depending on the individual's needs. But we need more funding options.

It is impossible to live independently when your house is not accessible.

Do I feed my family, pay my mortgage or have a ramp built? It is terrible to have to make choices like this.

People do not have extra money at the end of the month to make their homes accessible.

The current waiting list is long for home modifications. How can people be expected to wait to enter their homes because they can't get up the steps or access their kitchens or bathrooms?

I make enough money so I do not qualify for home modification funding but I do not make enough money to make the needed home modifications. I know there are many other people and families in this situation that feel like they are being forced to choose between work and an having an accessible home

Purchasing or Building Homes

Due to the lack of accessible home modification opportunities, the participants felt that even if they could afford to purchase or build a home, they could not afford to make it accessible.

If you want to buy a house, the existing housing stock is old and not accessible so a person with a disability will need lots of extra money to make it accessible on top of the mortgage for the house.

If you do build from scratch, which some of my friends who have wheelchairs have done, it is very expensive. You need to have a pretty good sum of money to be able to do something like that.

Emergency Funding

Concern was also shared about the need for more immediate home modification funds for people who are newly disabled.

We do not have access to emergency funds if someone becomes disabled and can no longer access their house.

Many people who are newly disabled cannot get back into their homes so what happens to them. They need immediate funding for modifications.

Complexes for Elderly and People with Disabilities

The need to increase accessible housing opportunities to limit high rise living for people with disabilities was also discussed.

People with disabilities are living in senior housing where the life style of the 20 year old is very different than that of a senior citizen. The seniors don't want to be listening to a boom box at 11:00 at night and the younger person does not want to go to bed at 9:30. That creates a major clash between the two populations and frequently leads to the management of these buildings to steer people with disabilities away to reduce the amount of tension in a building.

Overall the mixing of the two has been a very challenging management problems and hasn't worked well for either population.

I feel that a lot of times people with disabilities get housed with the elderly and that's not always a healthy situation for the person with a disability who does not have any choice but to live there order in order to be somewhere accessible.

People with disabilities tend to be in high rises and with the elderly, and a lot of times for people with disabilities that situation does not work.

However, a few participants in the Consumer Group identified the positive aspects of living in these complexes such as additional support services, accessibility features and increased housing opportunities. This is reflected in the following comments.

People with disabilities have had opportunities in the past to get programs going or to piggy back on elders by being grouped with them and using funding or services that are available for elders. But most people with disabilities say, "No I don't want to be associated with elders." In some ways that is true but there are so many similarities between the housing needs for people who are older and people with disabilities that I think that we are shooting ourselves in the foot by not being involved in the process because that is where the money is.

They have the support services in an accessible place with many more housing choices and this is what many people with disabilities need.

The elderly seems to have housing supports in place something that the majority of people with disabilities do not have and yet they need it.

Custom Homes

Participants shared feelings that the ideal housing environment for people with disabilities is housing that is built to meet individual needs. In addition, participants spoke of the need for increased understanding of universal design.

Housing needs to be build to match the needs of the person and that is just not being done. We need to customize homes.

I think there has been a lack of awareness of how housing could be designed to be accessible while keeping the costs as low as possible.

I think the idea for the universal design is good but it is viewed as primarily an architectural issue and not an equipment issue to address different disabilities like having signal devices that are accessible for folks like fire alarms and doorbells in the design. Many places that claim universal design are not set up for people with varying disabilities. For example the homes are not set up so modifications can be installed with minimal disruption and low cost later on. For example, a reinforced wall should be used in a bathroom so bracing is there beforehand and grab bars can easily be installed on day one or ten years later when needed without tearing down a wall.

There are places that make an attempt to do general, universal design modifications and most miss the point. The builders or owners think it's going to be accessible to everyone and it's just not the case.

Barriers to Family Support Services

Substantial concerns were expressed about the need for increased support services for families with adult children who have cognitive and developmental disabilities. The common themes noted among the respondents' quotes include:

need for increased support; lack of coordination for support services and a shortage of support service staff.

Need for Family Support

Feelings of anxiety, concern and fear were shared as to where adult children with cognitive and developmental disabilities will live when their parents become ill or die.

For parents to die without the piece of mind that their child has made the transition to another housing environment with staff or people that know their needs is absolutely horrendous. I cannot begin to describe the feeling of anxiety and worry

There are a whole lot of people living at home with very elderly parents. My friends are 80 and 84 and they have their son at home. They're healthy but they're not going to live forever. An assumption is made that they will just be taken care of. But who is going to take care of these kids?

Truly the situation is so bad that if one parent has past on and the other is terminally ill that is the when you can finally get your child on a housing list in the state of Rhode Island.

*The biggest barrier for my family is the support piece, which is probably accessibility. Our accessibility is our support team. The possibility is out there that someday we may be able to provide the supports for people with developmental disabilities in particular. But to base your whole life on that is not realistic. We can't expect it to happen. For us, we re-aligned our whole thought on it that *name* will probably be with us until we die. But then what happens?*

Coordination of Support Services

In addition, participants talked about the need for the coordination of support services.

I do not think housing support for families is a priority in this state. We have had housing service people come and talk to us and tell us what their program has to offer but we just haven't found the fuel to help us coordinate the many services together. There's no one center person or

place where you can stop and say, "Okay this is what I need, how do I get the support I need for my child?

Along the lines of support, there are a lot of adults with disabilities who progress to the point where they want to move on and get out of their parents home and be an adult but again, they're still having to live with families because they're not able to live independently because there isn't a good support service package.

Staff Shortage

There is a shortage of support staff available to assist families. This was best described in the following comment.

I've been told that even if we could fund a house ourselves that there are not enough workers to staff it.

Consumer Advocacy

Participants in the Leadership Group felt that a lack of advocacy skills was a barrier to the individual with a disability. These concerns were not expressed in the Consumer Group. The common themes noted among the respondents' quotes include: need for more awareness, limited financial understanding among youths and the need for advocacy skills.

Need for Increased Awareness

A lack of awareness among people with disabilities of the resources available to determine housing options was discussed.

There are probably Rhode Islanders with disabilities who don't realize that housing is available to them because they do not know where to go.

I think there is a group of housing opportunities that aren't being realized by the disabled.

There are a lot of resources out there that I don't think people with disabilities know about from fixing credit to classes in how to purchase your first home.

Management of Finances

It was felt that young people with disabilities need to learn how to manage finances. This was shared in the following comments.

Students with disabilities do not understand budgetary issues such as rent, utilities and other housing expenses.

Disabled students need to have more self discipline to learn to manage finances while they are at school.

There is a major gap among kids with disabilities and those without who are graduating school with this knowledge of managing finances for living expenses.

Advocacy Skills

The participants expressed concern that people with disabilities are not advocating for their housing rights and opportunities.

One area that needs to be addressed is self advocacy. A lot of times people with disabilities don't know how to advocate for themselves and so they do not get the housing they need.

I think there needs to do some training for disabled folks so that they feel comfortable and not be self conscious about going and representing their own housing interests.

People with disabilities need to learn to advocate and maximize their own abilities to move forward around housing issues and get the support services that they need.

Participants' Suggestions

When asked if they could identify one thing to do differently or in a better way to increase housing for people with disabilities, the participants shared their ideas. In analyzing the focus groups and coding the respondents' answers to the questions, the following themes emerged: housing system changes, increases in availability and accessibility of housing, more support services and raising awareness throughout the housing system of housing for people with disabilities. Some of these ideas are incorporated in this report's formal recommendations. The following quotes represent collectively the participants' suggestions.

Housing System Changes

The participants shared ideas on changes within the housing system including a central database for information, a universal subsidized application process and increased collaboration among agencies.

Have a one-stop location that would list all of the available properties out there plus all of the steps of how you make this happen.

Have a central clearing house for accessible housing information.

We need to look at creating a new registry system. Maybe look at creating maybe a Web site or some way that folks can go to that Web site or get that information in paper form too.

If all the housing agencies and organizations were working together and information were shared. I think this would be more cost effective and long term, I think it would knock down some of the barriers in terms of misconceptions about disabilities.

Having a universal application process in place for anyone that is looking for subsidized Section 8 housing.

I'd like to see the subsidized process be a little bit more universal throughout the state as opposed to each having their own ways of doing certain things.

In a perfect world, we would have affordable, accessible housing with the supports needed for all people with disabilities. Maybe it can become a reality if we all work together.

Availability and Accessibility of Housing

Suggestions were shared to address the availability and accessibility of housing including increasing home modification funding.

Increase the number of available, accessible housing options.

Under the changes to the Fair Housing Act last year, communities are now putting together their affordable housing plan and part of their requirement is that they have to look at all of the housing needs in their community, for everybody who needs affordable housing, including people with disabilities as well. And so making sure that the disability issue is addressed in each city's and town's affordable housing plan is important. We need to make sure that the disabled community is included in that and then more importantly, we then have to continue to push the state for implementation of those plans. So we can't just talk about building, we have to start to do it as well. But the very first step is to make sure that it is included and that communities are required to include units for disabled people in their 10% goal of affordability as well, and that is certainly something that HRC has tried to integrate in its affordable housing plans right now.

Work with Habitat for Humanity or develop something similar for people with disabilities.

A striped down house similar to Habitat for Humanity by developing a simple, functionally useable and adaptable accessible model for housing and preferably something that could then be used in production.

I think it is important not to overbuild –the idea of identifying the disabled communities that are looking for housing and trying to match their needs with housing that is being built.

So somewhere along this line we have to talk about funding and does funding really complement all of these needs that were trying to solve?

We need to look at not just at meeting the accessibility requirements but the function for the user. We often find that the design meets the code but users have different levels of function.

Developing a universal plan of what accessibility means and have it enforced across all housing areas.

I'd like to see more financial incentives for businesses and private persons to build affordable and accessible housing throughout the state.

More funding opportunities for home modifications. Be it a ramp or a signaling device for a doorbell. There would be a fund that people could tap into to do modifications rapidly, if needed as opposed to having to go through normal channels out there right now.

Increase home modifications funds and broaden requirements.

We need more options for modifications. We need to have choices and not be denied due specific criteria.

Support Services

Participants shared thoughts on the need for more collaborative support services and the need to increase supports for families.

I would like to see more support to families with children so that we are able to keep the families together and reach their fullest earning potential.” “Whether its housing that's group kind of housing or apartments with supports on site or supports that go to peoples housing. Especially it seems that people who have children are in a gap for receiving services.

We can't forget the relation between housing and transportation, especially in the rural areas, if we're expanding affordable housing people

can't get from their homes to the grocery store. Having a different problem when we solve another.

Collectively, the biggest need is to push for a system in place to help families. Until we create that –that then gets us more people who are willing to recognize that yeah, we need affordable housing in this community because my 18 year old isn't going to be able to live here. Until we create that program we will be preaching to each other.

See the Support of Service funding starting with the person as their looking for housing and helping them to get in, to help pay their utilities and get furniture . We do that at the Coalition but it is so labor intensive getting just one person into housing. It has been a revelation to me how difficult it is to identify the home and actually move into the home. We do need to continue to assist people to do as much of that as they can themselves but we also need to have some help.

More support to families with children with disabilities.

Just building on that when we are talking about supportive services we are really taking about a good quality of life. We are making a very good and valid argument that it is also a very cost effective approach because you have a person who knows that family, who can coordinate services and not have that individual going to a lot of different places and duplicating services. Instead, you have people using the existing services in a coordinated way and that's certainly a cost benefit.

There should be a tax-free account set aside for families with disabilities to build up over the years to have a house for a child so when the time is right the money can be used to build, buy or renovate a home for that person.

More support services and more funding to fund support services.

Education

Multiple suggestions were shared to increase awareness of and education about housing for people with disabilities.

Raise awareness and education through affiliations such as Housing Works, Statewide Planning and other organizations.

Educate people who work in housing agencies and organizations. We need to educate landlords, property managers and realtors.

Change attitudes in society toward housing for people with disabilities.

Eliminate housing discrimination for people with disabilities and their families.

I think there needs to be some effort to educate the public on accessibility issues and solutions that are often low cost and simple and that there are services available to help people learn about accessibility solutions.”

I think we need education for housing agencies and organizations. They do not have enough information about various disabilities and persons and that is impacting our housing choices. For example, just how to use the relay system.

Find a way to letting people with disabilities know what the options are.

One thought is I think that we need all of the non profits groups who work with disabled populations in our state to hear a message about housing affordability and opportunities. I think if we can look at the non profit sector as well as the public sector around ways to get that message out using newsletters, etc.

Also, there is a coalition, its fledging and is just beginning, called Housing Works and it has powerful support such as RI foundation and it is raising public awareness and working to educate communities. At least we will have a group working on the public awareness and acceptance of affordable housing. In order to get the cities and towns to do this the education and awareness is needed.

What we are doing today. The idea of having a think tank where we come together and recognize and identify needs and figure out ways to open the lines of communication to improve affordable housing.

More conversations and discussions like this one.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The comments from the focus group participants suggested a number of areas that have the potential to positively impact housing opportunities for people with disabilities.

State-wide Housing System

- ***Central Database*** Implement a central Rhode Island Accessible Housing Registry that includes public and private housing as well as privately operated subsidized housing.
- ***Housing Policy*** Develop a policy brief on the housing issues pertaining to people with disabilities that would address topics such as program and service accommodations, accessibility requirements, legal rights and responsibilities. This brief could be distributed across the housing continuum including emergency shelters, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, permanent housing, supportive services and crisis intervention including outreach assessment and referral.
- ***Collaborative Integration*** Initiate a forum in which key housing agencies and organizations such as the Housing Resources Commission and HousingWorks can discuss state-wide options to integrate policies, regulations and funding sources for housing and support services for people with disabilities.

- ***Communication Strategy***- Develop a communication strategy to streamline information to bridge the gaps among agencies, consumers and other partners.
- ***Coordination of Services***- Develop an action plan for coordination of services and increased collaborations to enhance partnerships among the organizations that provide housing and support services.
- ***Accessibility Standardization***- Develop policy for the standardization of the definition of housing “accessibility” to be used throughout the housing system.
- ***Frequently Asked Questions Fact Sheet***- Develop a Frequently Asked Questions fact sheet that identifies disability-specific housing questions and answers for individuals who are unfamiliar with the housing system including people who are homeless or newly disabled.
- ***Programs and Services Fact Sheet***: Develop an informational fact sheet on housing programs and disability serviced throughout the state.

Available, Affordable and Accessible Housing

- ***Integration of Disability*** Establish a mechanism to ensure affordable and accessible housing for people with disabilities are an integral part of the state wide initiatives such as the Five Year Housing Strategic Plan, Consolidated Plan, HousingWorks Policy Platform, Neighborhood Opportunities Program and other state housing initiatives.

- ***Measurements***- Conduct periodic measurements to assess the degree to which the implementation of housing programs and policies are addressing housing issues of people with disabilities.
- ***Action Plan***- Develop action strategies to enhance state-wide efforts to assure that housing rights are being appropriately implemented.
- ***Technical Assistance & Guidance***- Collaborate with the Governor's Commission on Disabilities to offer technical assistance and guidance on fair housing regulations, legal rights and responsibilities.
- ***Rights & Responsibilities***- Support the Disability Law Center in providing information to people with disabilities about their housing rights and responsibilities.
- ***Universal Application***- Develop a subsidized housing application to be used throughout the state.
- ***Housing Strategy for Young Adults***- Develop a strategy to examine additional housing opportunities for young people with disabilities outside of complexes for the elderly.

Home Modifications

- ***Home Modifications Loan Program***- Develop legislation for a Home Modifications Loan Program for Individuals with Disabilities (similar to Massachusetts) to provide loans for modifications to a homeowner who has a disability, has a household member who has a disability (or rents to

an individual with a disability). The goal of the program is for people with disabilities to live independently in their communities.

- ***Program Information***- Develop relevant program information and materials to be widely distributed throughout the state.

Societal Attitudes

- ***Awareness & Sensitivity Program***- Offer a two hour seminar program for town and city housing decision makers to educate and sensitize them about current issues and environment of housing for people with disabilities.
- ***Public Relations Campaign*** -Initiate a state wide public relations campaign that raises awareness of housing for diverse populations including people with disabilities and their families.

Family Support Services

- ***Central Clearinghouse*** Develop a central clearinghouse to coordinate resources, services, accommodations and technology to assist families with the housing needs of adult children with disabilities.

Raise Awareness

- ***Accommodations*** – There is a need to overcome the prevailing belief on the part of many landlords and property managers that accommodations are very expensive. Provide a training seminar to address the various accommodations and the limited cost of most accommodations.

- ***Perceptions of People with Disabilities*** – Many property managers, landlords and realtors the disability and are not able to understand the implications of different disabilities and the varying skills and abilities possessed by people with disabilities. This is another training opportunity that can be addressed.
- ***Attitudes*** – Provide sensitivity training to housing agency staff employers to increase understanding of the importance of providing housing opportunities for people with disabilities.
- ***Resource Dissemination*** – The importance of resource dissemination strongly suggests the need for the Rhodes to Independence website to include extensive links to other sites that provide housing options and services for people with disabilities.

Consumer Advocacy

- ***Skills Model***: Develop a housing skills model to identify information/skills needed to empower people with disabilities to advocate for their housing needs and provide housing advocacy training sessions.
- ***Networking***– People with disabilities should be encouraged to openly and regularly let others know that they are seeking housing. Underlying this approach may be the need to provide training and education to people with disabilities that teaches and demonstrates effective networking skills.

- ***Training Module***- Develop a training module on housing transition to be utilized by high school educators working with students with disabilities.

CONCLUSION

This research has identified the need for increased housing opportunities for people with disabilities. The recommendations provided can be implemented to enhance the housing experiences for individuals with disabilities. State-wide commitments to sustainable systems changes that will remove barriers to housing for people with disabilities is imperative in order to ensure that Rhode Islanders with disabilities can live in the community and housing arrangement of their choice.

Appendix A

Rhodes to Independence Housing Focus Group Protocol

Facilitator	Welcome and introduction of facilitator and observer.
Facilitator	Description of focus group process and structure.
Facilitator	Remind participants that they may refuse participation at any time and are under no obligation to respond to any questions that make them feel uncomfortable.
Participants	Questions and clarification of information overview provided.
Facilitator	Announce that audio tape is about to be turned on. Remind participants not to mention any names. If names are mentioned accidentally, they will be deleted from the tape and will not appear in any transcripts. Once transcribed, tapes will be erased.
Observer	Start audio tape recording.
Facilitator	Lead introductions of each participant. State first name only.
Facilitator	Lead the group through the following topics starting with open-ended questions, and using more directed questions to clarify responses by group members:
	What is the first word that comes to mind when you think of housing for people with disabilities?
	How high of a priority is housing for people with disabilities?
	What are the positives about housing in RI for people with disabilities?
	What are the biggest barriers for people with disabilities in obtaining housing in Rhode Island?
	How would you describe the housing system in Rhode Island?
	How would you describe the housing system for people with disabilities?
	Where do people with disabilities obtain information on housing?
	If you could identify one thing to do differently or in a better way to increase housing for people with disabilities --- what would it be?
Facilitator	Is there anything that we should have talked about but did not?
Facilitator	Thank participants for taking part in the focus group. Solicit and respond to any questions.
Facilitator	Provide contact information should participants have any further questions at a later time.
Facilitator	Adjourn.

Appendix B

Rhodes to Independence Housing Workgroup Members

Staff: Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Ed.D.

Chair: Michelle Malloy
Corporation for Supportive Housing

Co-Chair: Kristen Connors
Office of Congressman Jim Langevin

Jay Burdick
Department of Human Services

Leo Canuel,
Executive Director
PARI Independent Living Center

Brenda Clement
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RI Housing Network

Diane Cook
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Ann LeClerc
RI Public Transit Authority

Jeff Mason
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Leigh Pagnozzi
Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless

Camille Pansa
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Statewide Independent Living Council

Arthur Plitt
RI Governor's Commission on Disabilities

Darlene Price
Housing Resource Commission

Chris Rancourt
RI Governor's Commission on Disabilities

Lorna C. Ricci
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Mary Teresa Shadduck
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Marie Strauss
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Roger Warren
Executive Director
RI Builders Association

Robert Winters
United Cerebral Palsy of RI