

## **Regional Meeting of Municipal Fairfield County Disability Advocates**

### **MINUTES**

Thursday, April 11<sup>th</sup> at 10am  
Westport Center for Senior Services  
21 Imperial Avenue, Westport, CT 06880

#### **Welcome -** First Selectman Jim Marpe

Welcomed attendees to the newly enhanced Senior Center & discussed the 2017 creation of the Commission on People with Disabilities highlighting Westport's commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities have the opportunity and support to enjoy full and equal access to lives of independence, productivity, inclusion and self-determination.

#### **Introductions -** Jim Ross, Chair of the Commission on People with Disabilities & Elaine Daignault, Director of Human Services, Westport

(See attached spreadsheet for a list of attendees and other municipal representatives)

#### **ADA Coalition of Connecticut –** Karen H. Green, Program Manager

- Provided an overview of the programs and services of the ADACC including their offering of 9 training modules for ADA Coordinators to earn their municipal certification and as a clearing house of information and resources available to members and others.
- Each town is required to have an ADA Coordinator and to publicly post their ADA policy and grievance procedure
- *ADACC is the only organization in the state singularly devoted to educating individuals with disabilities, businesses, and governmental entities about the ADA.*

#### **Overview of Informal Survey of Municipalities** - responses from Trumbull, Ridgefield, Westport, Wilton, Stamford, Stratford and Weston.

- The top three identified critical areas of focus are physical access (60%), transportation (30%) and Housing (10%) with Employment as a 4<sup>th</sup> priority.
- Discussion of the number of individuals with disabilities in our communities (baseline is 6-10%) – census, SSDI and other resources may not provide clear picture of the need for services.
- Language matters – useful to identify common language to address a diverse cross section of individuals
  - Also discussed titles of various advocacy groups and the need for thoughtful language in this regard.
- Noted challenges across towns, noting that there are some discrepancies based on location, and socio-economic demographic:
  - **Transportation** access for all – outcome of SWCAA efforts to regionalize resources are unknown

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- **Housing** focus on BOTH affordability and accessibility, keeping in mind non-DDS individuals
- **Transition Programs & Supports** (21 year old “cliff”) –
  - Opportunity for stronger advocacy at the state level to improve protection/services for the “forgotten” 21-55 year old?
  - Focusing on employment and opportunities, are there regional opportunities for municipalities to partner with local non-profits and providers to enhance resources and services?
- **Retail and access by private businesses** – how to encourage and advocate for compliance

### Trends?

- **Aging parents of adult children with disabilities** - some communities noted an influx of aging parents seeking supports for their adult children’s long-term sustainable care and housing needs. (Is this an affluence issue for families who were previously able to care for and financially support their children?)
  - **Regional resource** of lawyers to help with disability applications, conservatorship, etc. (STAR used to have a great list, could we recreate it or get a copy?)
- **ADA/504 Self-Assessment** – Municipalities are required by law to evaluate accessibility per Title 2 of ADA. Few towns have easily completed the evaluation with Stamford and Ridgefield having recently completed their review. Norwalk has also completed a self-assessment. Challenges for all municipalities include staff time, funding, remediation plans for shortcomings, resources and prioritization by town as an essential project.
  - Possible resources include Project Civic Access, DOJ, ADA.gov, Use of college students (Sacred Heart and Fairfield U) capstone projects to help address research of gaps in services, Utilization of the Services for the Blind

**Roundtable/Highlights from each Municipality** (5 minutes each) regarding their services, efforts, priorities, challenges and opportunities for People with Disabilities

- **Bridgeport** – 38,000 disabled in city out of \$150,000, may be under-reported
- **Fairfield** – establishing a commission to address the needs of disability community, employment opportunities, increase in aging parents of children with disabilities seeking support
- **Ridgefield** - ADA Self-Assessment in progress, many businesses providing employment opportunities, strong advocacy board “Ridgefield for Accessibility”
- **Stamford** – Strong advocacy group “Access for All” bringing together volunteers and municipal representatives to address a variety of access issues
- **Stratford** – Senior Center and Social Services as resources
- **Wilton** – making progress on advocating for disabled housing, not just affordable
- **Weston** – is there an ADA coordinator?

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- **Westport** – strides in emergency preparedness – voluntary registry, beach facilities, new initiative on employment, noted increase in individuals seeking services, possibly as a result of new “Commission on People with Disabilities” providing visibility of Human Services as a resource.

### **Discussion**

- How to enhance/improve services and resources at the municipal level?
- Ways to bring more supports/assistance to Fairfield County towns
- Could/should there be a regional work group on disability issues?
- Are there new ways to coordinate/inform region of opportunities & legislation?

### **Opportunities for regionalization or resource development and supports:**

- Shift mindset of municipalities to build in ADA across all disciplines – purchasing, infrastructure/technology, focus not on simple accommodations but strategic and inclusive in all town initiatives
- Housing – research and champion disabled housing opportunities, not just low-income affordable
- Use of technology to address the needs of diverse population – transportation, town/municipal services, etc.
- Greater outreach and education of consumers and residents
- Transportation – crowd sourcing opportunities and engaging in formula grants to leverage funds
- Review current cases/situations – develop best practices via discussion among municipalities
- Shared grant writing/programs

**Sense of the meeting** – establishing special topic areas for small groups/committees to explore and report back to group via crowd sourced, accessible website (SLACK?) and/or occasional in-person meetings.

Next steps: Committees and meeting dates TBD

**Adjourn**