Toolkit For Municipalities

Integrated Community Project
Acknowledgements

With grateful appreciation, The Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey thanks the following two ICP Grant Partners along with the many organizations listed in Appendix B for their help in making this Toolkit possible.

Grant Partners

This initiative was funded by an Inclusive Healthy Communities Grant from the Division of Disability Services, New Jersey Department of Human Services.

About SHA

The Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey (SHA) is a statewide, nonprofit membership organization, founded in 1998, whose mission is to promote and maintain a strong supportive housing industry in New Jersey serving people with special needs. SHA engages in education, advocacy and networking for and on behalf of its over 100 members.

Supportive Housing Association of NJ (SHA) • (908) 931-1131 • www.shanj.org

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June 2022
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Welcome

The Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey is pleased to share with you our Integrated Community Project (ICP) Toolkit for Municipalities.

Municipalities across New Jersey are already using best and emerging practices to help all residents feel involved in the day-to-day life of their cities and towns. The Toolkit aims to enhance that work and offers recommended best practices and strategies to improve how individuals with disabilities and barriers can better participate in their communities. Information in this Toolkit addresses the needs of individuals with developmental, physical, communication, and intellectual disabilities, mental illness, in recovery for substance abuse, who are aging, or who have experienced homelessness.

The Toolkit is organized around making the case for inclusion and how to include people with disabilities and the dimensions of community participation in the physical environment, cultural and recreational opportunities, civic participation and engagement, communication, transportation, and housing. The ICP strives to increase the capacity of people with disabilities and barriers to become fully engaged in their communities. The Toolkit works with the process used in the framework guiding the work of the ICP.

Using the ICP’s framework in our work with individual municipalities has opened a dialogue illuminating the diversity of disabilities, the desire, regardless of disability type, to become more involved, and the untapped resources available that can help with integration. Relationships and partnerships have formed through which municipalities and community leaders will continue the mutual work towards improving community integration using this Toolkit.

We are interested in hearing about what resources and best and emerging practices are helping to make your municipality more integrated. We would possibly add them to our Toolkit! Please email your insights to Kate Kelly, Integrated Community Project Manager at kate.kelly@shanj.org.

I encourage you to use this resource as you work to continue to expand the opportunities that will make a significant social impact on the lives of individuals with disabilities and barriers and their families.

Sincerely,

Kate Kelly
Integrated Community Project Manager
Introduction

An Overview of Individuals with Disabilities in New Jersey

Nearly 1 in every 4 adults in New Jersey live with a disability.

In total, there are over 900,000 adults represented across the Garden State who face barriers to inclusion based on living with a disability.

Depending on the source, it has been reported that as many as 23% of adults in New Jersey, roughly 1 in 4 people, have a disability. According to The Rutgers, NJAES Office of Research and eAnalytics, over 900,000 people live with a disability across the state in each county and municipality.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):
Over thirty years ago, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law, protecting the civil rights of those with disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities and barriers are old and young, male and female, and represent a variety of race and ethnicities. Their disabilities and barriers may be different, including developmental, intellectual or physical, with diverse independent living skills and assistance needs. While many differences can be identified, the overall unifying theme that people with disabilities share is wanting to feel more connected and more involved where they live.

Municipalities across the state are already using best and emerging practices to help all residents feel involved in the day-to-day life of their cities and towns. The Toolkit aims to enhance that work and offers recommended best practices and strategies to improve how individuals with disabilities and barriers can better participate in their communities. Information in this Toolkit addresses the needs of individuals with developmental, physical, communication, and intellectual disabilities, mental illness, in recovery for substance abuse, who are aging, or who have experienced homelessness.

The Integrated Community Project (ICP)

For over thirty years, communities have striven to be follow the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) and provide access to community life to everyone. However, the notion of community participation has yet to evolve beyond improved access to physical facilities in municipalities and there is often a long way to go to ensure that everyone is included and integrated in the day-to-day life of their community.
The Integrated Community Project (ICP):

- Works toward the goal of increasing the capacity of people with disabilities and barriers to become fully engaged in their communities.
- Helps communities shift from defining inclusion as simply making accommodations for individuals with disabilities to improving people's lives to involving people with disabilities in every aspect of planning. You can learn more with this brief video about the Integrated Community Project.

More information about the ICP is available in Appendix A.

A complete list of the ICP Partners is available in Appendix B.

The ICP Toolkit

The ICP Toolkit for Municipalities was created to provide practical advice and guidance to cities and towns in New Jersey. The experts truly guided decisions about the content of the Toolkit. They include the individuals with lived experience who participated in ICP focus groups, the members of the ICP Leadership Teams in Bergen, Camden, and Ocean Counties and the municipal leaders and key staff in the nine municipalities in three counties who have participated in the ICP Self-Assessment.

A list of municipalities that have completed the Self-Assessment is available in Appendix C.

The Self-Assessment for Municipalities is available in Appendix E.

What is in this Toolkit?

The resources and best practices in the toolkit will help municipalities build on their community integration work. The core content of resources and best practices are organized under the categories of: making the case for inclusion, including people with disabilities, the physical environment, cultural and recreational opportunities, civic participation and engagement, communication, transportation, and housing access.

These resources, which include best practices, guides, webinars, trainings and articles, are intended to help expand the work of community integration and inclusion.
Who Should Use This Toolkit?

This Toolkit can help municipalities create efficiencies by sharing information gathered through the work of the ICP. Advocates for individuals with disabilities and barriers and individuals themselves may also find this Toolkit to be useful in their work.

How To Use This Toolkit and Getting Started

Community integration can be an incremental process and there is no need to address all areas where your community would like to improve at once. Communities that adopt the activities in this Toolkit that will better meet the needs in their communities. Strategies for improving community integration will continue to emerge and evolve; well-established processes for addressing community integration will continue to become more widely adopted. We plan to periodically update this Toolkit as needed.

To make the most of this Toolkit, a municipality may want to schedule an ICP Self-Assessment. Participating in the Self-Assessment helps municipalities recognize and celebrate the good work already being done to integrate people with disabilities and barriers into the community. The Self-Assessment may also help communities prioritize areas where they would like to focus on improving community integration.

Any municipality interested in scheduling an interactive virtual ICP Self-Assessment meeting, should email Kate Kelly, Integrated Community Project Manager at kate.kelly@shanj.org.
Making the Case for Inclusion

Individuals with disabilities experience bias, stigma, and exclusion. Inclusion means all people with lived experience with disabilities and barriers can participate in the day-to-day life of their communities, are employed in meaningful work, access community facilities, and live in affordable and supportive housing. All individuals should be able to have access to voting for their elected officials, inform policymakers, make recommendations, advocate about their needs, and hold elected office themselves. The following tools can help you better understand the need for and also make the case for inclusion in your community.

- **The Disability Profile Snapshots from Rutgers, NJAES Office of Research and Analytics** (also referenced in the introduction of this Toolkit) allows municipalities to search for municipal and county data around the picture of disabilities in a local area. This data may be helpful in better understanding the depth and breadth of the individuals in a community for whom you can expand inclusion.

- This recorded webinar **Disability: 101** from RespectAbility gives an overview of the individuals who make up the 60 million+ people who live with some form of physical, cognitive, sensory, mental health or other disability in the United States. Viewers will gain a basic understanding of how disability intersects with multiple content areas, from employment and poverty to criminal justice reform and education. And connecting to the following section about How to Include People With Disabilities, the video shares 10 key tips on how you can welcome, respect and include people with disabilities. Modeling a best practice around accessibility, this resource allows you to read the webinar transcript, download the accessible PowerPoint, and watch the webinar on YouTube with open captioning.

- **The Case for Inclusion 2022: Blazing Trails to Sustainability for Community Disability Services** from the Ancor Foundation and United Cerebral Palsy shares the scope of the challenges faced with ensuring that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities are included in their communities.

- There is also a [Case for Inclusion scorecard](#) for the State of New Jersey.

- This [How and Why Disability Bias Remains Pervasive](#) blog comes from the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, an ICP grant partner. In order to understand the pervasiveness of bias towards people with disabilities, it is helpful to understand why it still exists. Bias can be more subtle or more obvious and individuals with disability experience ableism.
University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities: Work to achieve the goal of independence, productivity, self-determination, and opportunities for full participation in community activities for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

- Individuals who are aging often face barriers in their communities. People with lived experience often shared that they had never thought about the similarities between the barriers faced by people with disabilities and people who are aging. Municipalities may want to examine what they offer to people who are aging and expand those offerings to people with disabilities.

By 2035, people aged 65+ will outnumber people under age 18 in the USA.
*According to New Jersey Future and recent Census Bureau projections.

New Jersey currently ranks 10th in the nation for residents over the age of 60.

- The Boggs Center for Developmental Disabilities, an ICP partner, is New Jersey’s federally designated University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. The Center’s website offers a variety of resources including information about person-centered approaches and supports, workforce development, and an array of national and New Jersey resources.

A person-centered approach: Selects and organizes the services and supports that an older adult or person with a disability may need to live in the community. Most importantly, it is a process that is directed by the person who receives the support.

And to continue to meet the needs of their populations that are aging and have other barriers, communities can offer transportation resources (see section on Transportation below) and connections to those who do not drive, physical and social activities, amenities such as parks and safe streets, and a mix of appropriate and affordable housing options. The report, Creating Great Places to Age for Every Person in Every Neighborhood, contains municipal level data.

- The report, Age-Friendly Community Initiatives in Northern New Jersey by Rutgers University shares information about initiatives working to improve the social, built, and service environments in the local communities of municipalities across Northern New Jersey. These initiatives work to make New Jersey and its communities better places for people to live throughout the entirety of their lives. Forming advisory groups and establishing partnerships to inform community integration work is a best practice.

A description of the methodologies and best practices used for the ICP focus groups and leadership teams is available in Appendix D.

- In its report Advancing New Jersey’s Employment First Practices and Policies, the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities (NJCDD) highlights strengths to build on, challenges and how to realize the vision of Employment First including how to improve employment outcomes.
Best Practices for How to Include People With Disabilities

Welcoming people with disabilities and showing them that you see them and not their disability is very important. A best practice for including people with hearing loss is to use induction loop technology (also known as hearing loops) in meeting rooms and areas and provide captioning and live transcription in virtual events. A best practice for including people who are blind or visually impaired is to always describe yourself before you begin speaking. People with disabilities said that access to attend events virtually expanded their ability to be involved in the day-to-day life of their communities. A best practice for inclusive meetings and activities is to offer accessible virtual and hybrid opportunities to people with disabilities. The following tools can help you better understand how to include people with disabilities in your community.

- Bergen County created its Disability Awareness Guide as a resource to providing awareness around various disabilities and shared helpful suggestions for positive interactions. Its guidelines may be helpful for interacting not only with people with visible disabilities but also individuals with hidden disabilities, who are aging and the general public.

- The Build Back Better Vision for a Post-Pandemic World that is Person Centered and Inclusive for All People with Disabilities video provides an excellent case study of how to include people with a variety of disabilities in a virtual event. A best practice modeled in this webinar is providing closed captioning, or better yet, open captioning and also a live transcript in real time. There are services available that provide transcription. Additionally, a best practice is that the presenters described what was happening during the event including the appearance of the speakers.

- The Partnering with Persons with Lived Experience Lessons Learned Webinar from U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Exchange shares the stories of individuals who experience the barrier of homelessness. A best practice modeled in this webinar for communities looking to strengthen partnerships with persons with lived experience is providing the opportunity to hear peoples’ stories.

- A best practice to include people with disabilities is to ask them what they need to feel included. A best practice to learn from people with lived experience is to ask them to participate in a survey. The Somerset County Office of Aging and Disability Services uses a needs assessment survey to offer residents an opportunity to help the County make decisions about the most needed community-based senior services.

- Information about how the ICP ran focus groups and developed leadership teams is in Appendix D.
Physical Environment

**Physical environment:** The physical environment is where individuals live, learn, work, and play.

People interact with their physical environment through the air they breathe, water they drink, houses they live in, and the transportation they access to travel to work and school.

Universal design can help individuals with disabilities besides hearing loss. For those with hearing loss, induction (hearing) looping, open captioning and good acoustics provide access without having to make special requests. Thinking beyond access for individuals with hearing loss, the Chester County (Pennsylvania) Planning Commission shares information about how universal design works along with some practical case studies examples.

**Accommodations**

In order to participate in events and activities, people with hearing loss need accommodations in their physical environment just as others with different disabilities and barriers need wheelchair ramps, automatic doors and other accommodations.

The following tools can help you better understand the need for and also make the case for accommodations.

A best practice for ensuring the individuals with hearing loss feel integrated is to offer hearing/induction loops, captioning and American Sign Language. You can learn more by reading Making Your Community Accessible to People with Hearing Loss from the Hearing Loss Association of America – New Jersey State Association. Additional resources for assisting individuals with hearing loss are available through the New Jersey Department of Human Services Division of Deaf and Hard of Hearing – Services, Resources, Education and Training.

The State of New Jersey recently accepted applications for community grants to promote communication and language access for deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind residents of all ages. While the application deadline has passed, this press release NJ Human Services Opens Communication Access Grants to Help Make Communities More Inclusive for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind Individuals from the NJ Department of Human Services includes important information.

Read more for what is being done to expand access in some private spaces in the Movie Theatres Roll Out Enhanced Disability Access from The Disability Scoop. In this case, providing open captioning is universal access for people with hearing loss.
Cultural and Recreation Opportunities

Opportunities for culture and recreation contribute immeasurably to the health and quality of life of individuals in a community. When accommodations are available, municipalities should think about how they are offered or publicized. A best practice is to include in communications about events and activities, information about how individuals with disabilities can access transportation, sign up or register, participate, and/or receive financial assistance to be involved. A best practice is to include a contact number and email for questions in all communication about an upcoming event. Easy to find contact information can provide reassurance if an attendee is lost or has a last-minute question. The following tools can help you better understand community integration to make cultural and recreation activities more accessible.

The National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD) offers a library of e-learning opportunities to educate disability and non-disability service providers in areas of community health inclusion (the NCHPAD e-learning website requires you to provide your name and email to log in). NCHPAD is a public health practice and resource center on promoting health for people with disabilities. Within this resource, the focused areas on fitness, recreation and sport and also disability and aging might be the most helpful e-learning opportunities for municipalities that want to improve the accessibility of their cultural and recreation opportunities to all residents. NCHPADs e-training on Holding Inclusive Events provides instructions and advice about how to make events, no matter their size, location or topic, accessible to all. This event planning guide for engaging with people who are disabled from Equality Rights includes multiple checklists about what to consider when planning event in which people with disabilities and barriers feel included. This Accessible Meeting & Event Checklist is another excellent resource in planning accessible events. A best practice is, when you send out the invitation or notice to an event, include a welcome message to let invitees know who they can contact regarding any accommodations or accessibility that they may need. This checklist from Cornell University provides a comprehensive list of what to think about when planning for accessible meetings and events.
Civic Engagement and Participation

As referenced earlier in this toolkit, municipalities can plan virtual, in-person and hybrid meetings that provide opportunities to access for all individuals with disabilities and barriers. Individuals with disabilities seek opportunities to attend meetings, serve on boards and committees, volunteer for their community, and share their talents and expertise in a meaningful way. Municipalities can provide employment and paid/unpaid internship opportunities for people with disabilities. Ensuring that all individuals with disabilities have access to voting is critical to civic participation and engagement. Municipalities and counties are the home to agencies, organizations, and committees that serve a variety of individuals with disabilities and barriers which can make for excellent employers and partners in inclusion. The following resources can share tools around civic engagement and participation.

A best practice is offering meetings in a hybrid format. The University of Wisconsin-Madison shares this guidance for How to Hold Inclusive Hybrid Meetings.

RespectAbility shares specific best practices around Ensuring Accessibility During the Return of In-Person Events – And Why We Should Keep Doing Accessible Virtual Events. This webinar explains why, as we return to in-person events, we should not stop hosting virtual events.

To increase access for people with disabilities to meetings, virtual platforms available for recording, transcribing, and organizing meetings all in one place – fireflies.ai is one example.

Sustainable Jersey offers guidance on best practices for how municipal governments can engage with people with disabilities.

The ICP created a guide for conducting focus groups and creating leadership teams with individuals with disabilities and barriers in Appendix D. The Township of Wayne (New Jersey) is establishing a commission to be a voice for people with special needs who live in the community. You can read more about this new commission working to meet the needs of individuals over the age of 21 in the article, Wayne to form new panel to advocate for people with special needs. People with lived experience could lend their voices as one of the six “civilians” who will be appointed to the commission.

In order to be fully involved in their community, every individual with a disability should know their rights about voting and how to vote. Voting: It’s Your Right is a resource developed by Rutgers University and the Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities.
Hiring People with Disabilities

Many people with lived experience told us that they are looking for meaningful employment and internships. A best practice for a municipality in integrating people with disabilities in their community is hiring them to do the work of the community. In early 2022, the State of New Jersey implemented new legislation to increase opportunities for people with disabilities to work for the State. The first of these two laws established a fast-tracked hiring and advancement opportunity program to help qualified persons with significant disabilities participate in the competitive hiring and promotion process within the State workforce. Under the program, appointing authorities will be more efficient in hiring, promoting, retaining, and advancing qualified individuals with physical or mental disabilities. The second law, the State as a Model Employer of People with Disabilities (SAME) program raises awareness for employment opportunities for people with disabilities, removes barriers to the application and hiring process, and creates mechanisms to increase retention rates for people with disabilities employed by the State. The following tools can help you in hiring people with disabilities.

A best practice for hiring and offering internships to people with disabilities is ensuring that all technology and social media is accessible to them.

The U.S. Department of Labor provides a variety of resources around Hiring People with Disabilities. These resources including information about effective strategies for recruiting, hiring, retaining and advancing people with disabilities, workplace accommodations and resources specifically around internships.

NJ WorkAbility offers people with disabilities who are working and whose income would otherwise make them ineligible for Medicaid, the opportunity to receive full Medicaid coverage. New Jersey’s Medicaid Workability program enables individuals with disabilities to live more meaningful and productive lives by allowing them to work without fear of losing their Medicaid benefits. The newest legislation expands the program substantially, and by eliminating the income limit, relieves individuals with disabilities of the need to decide between work or Medicaid. Read more in the article Groundbreaking Expansion of Medicaid Workability Program On the Way.

Assistive Technology: Represents a wide range of technology that support people to live and work more independently.
Assistive technology can be helpful in making accommodations to individual disabilities in the workplace and also in allowing them to be involved in other aspects of community life.

The Richard West Assistive Technology Advocacy Center (ATAC) website provides valuable services, assistive technology, accessibility, conferences and webinars and resources. The Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey includes an Inclusive Technology Bulletin on its Housing Hub page. The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities (NJCDD), offers many resources on its website. (along with other very helpful resources around employment, housing, transportation and voting!)

Additional resources around employment include the Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey’s Supportive Employment for Individuals with Disabilities in New Jersey bulletin. The National Center on Advancing Person-Centered Practices and Systems (NCAPPS) shared in their brief, Disability Employment and Being Person-Centered in the New Normal best practices around providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities that pay benefits and living wages, are flexible, person-centered, and that support self-sufficiency, independence and self-determination.

Volunteering for municipalities is another way that individuals can be connected to their towns and cities in a meaningful way. Individuals with disabilities and barriers have communicated that they want to contribute both their time and talents to their communities. Partners4Housing makes a case citing studies in the article, Giving Back With A Twist, explaining the benefits of volunteering for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their communities.
Communication

Communication ensures that individuals with disabilities and barriers learn about events, activities, and other opportunities in their community in a timely and accessible way. **A best practice** is sharing municipal level information through a variety of communication channels to ensure that all individuals feel included and involved in their community.

**A best practice** is clear communication that reaches people with a variety of disabilities and barriers, including all communication written in plain language, ensuring that event calendars posted on municipal websites are accessible, have a link for a “quick contact” about the event, and that all information is kept as up to date and is as current as possible. There is nothing more frustrating than clicking on a “bad link” or finding information that is out of date or about past events.

The following tools can help you better improve access and inclusion through communication.

The federal Social Security Administration shares a variety of helpful resources for writing in plain language, including [Checklists and Handouts for writing in plain language](#). Another resource with **tips and checklists for writing in plain language is available from Accessibility.com**. The **University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture** shares a Plain Language and Accessibility Q&A and a brief three minute video about [Plain Language for Everyone, Even Experts](#). A sample text of plain language can be found in **Appendix D**.

Due to shrinking local news coverage, municipalities use social media and web-based apps to communicate about events in their town to keep residents up to date about what is going on in their city or town. Neighbors can use “Nextdoor” to stay connected to each other, share local information, and provide rides to each other to municipal activities. Municipalities push information out through their websites, email newsletters, email, and text alerts.

It is critical to communication that not only does everyone know how to use social media, or web-based apps, but that all communication channels are accessible to people with disabilities. **A best practice** is that municipalities can create and embed on their websites with short “how to” videos that explain to residents with disabilities how to navigate all the communication channels. **A best practice** is that municipal staff responsible for social media content and other communication staff should work to ensure that their messages reach the largest and widest audience, including those with disabilities. This recorded webinar on [Making Social Media Accessible for People with Disabilities](#) from CIDlaccess provides best practices making social media accessible for individuals with disabilities and barriers. Harvard University shares **best practices for using plain language on websites** and web-based apps. This guide from digital.gov gives excellent tips for improving access to social media.
Transportation

Not surprisingly, individuals with disabilities and barriers report that transportation is the largest barrier that keeps them from feeling integrated in their communities. Often activities in the day-to-day life of cities and towns happen at locations not accessible by public transportation or at times of the day or week when transportation options are limited.

Barriers to transportation are often exacerbated when individuals do not have enough advance notice about meetings, events, and activities) and need to quickly find a ride to get somewhere. A best practice is that this frustration can be avoided by communicating about all municipal activities early, clearly, and often, so that people with disabilities have the advance notice they need to secure transportation. There are resources that can help municipalities connect their residents with improved access to transportation. The following tools can help make better connections to transportation.

**Travel Instruction:** A spectrum of services meant to teach safe independent travel skills on public transit: the bus, train, light rail, county and private systems.

The New Jersey Travel Independence Program (NJTIP) at Rutgers University provides remote training to increase the independence and self-sufficiency of people with disabilities, older adults, and others by empowering them to use the public transit system safely and independently.

Complete Streets in NJ are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users – pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. A best practice is that municipalities can adopt Complete Streets policies and The New Jersey Department of Transportation gives special consideration to municipalities with adopted Complete Streets policies when reviewing applications submitted for federal and most state grant funding opportunities. Municipalities share that when opportunities arise, they continue to strive to make their communities as walkable as possible. A best practice is to ask individuals with disabilities and barriers, as well as the organizations who serve them, about where accommodations such as curb cuts are most needed.

This video from Ocean Ride shares case studies: the stories of those who drive Ocean Ride vehicles, the individuals with disabilities, and those who rely on rides to feel involved in their community. This video may enhance your thinking about accessible transportation as necessary for full community inclusion. Ocean Ride provides transportation services to individuals with disabilities (age 18 and over) and seniors (age 60 and over) within Ocean County.

Transportation services such as Uber and Lyft can help individuals with disabilities and barriers in your community get to meetings, events, and activities in your community. Both provide information about their accessibility that you may want to share with your residents - Accessibility Using Uber and Lyft’s Commitment to Accessibility.
Supportive housing or special needs housing is affordable housing designed to serve people with barriers and/or disabilities. Often those who live in supportive housing receive services that allow them to live independently. Most people want to be able live in communities of their choice near family and friends or close to where they work. For people with special needs, this is even more important. At the same time, there is an enormous shortage of affordable housing in NJ. According to The National Low Income Housing Coalition, NJ faces a shortage of 207,801 affordable rental homes available for extremely low income renters. Therefore, a best practice is to include supportive housing in municipal planning. The following tools can help you better understand the need for and also make the case for affordable and supportive housing in your community.

Supportive Housing 101 from CSH shares the basics about supportive housing. The Fair Housing Act of 1985 asserted that each municipality had an obligation to foster some degree of affordable housing. Consequently, each municipality in the State of New Jersey is required to have an affordable housing plan. Fortunately, it can be advantageous for municipalities to include supportive housing in their affordable housing plan. By producing supportive housing, towns often can take advantage of a two for one credit bonus per bedroom, earning additional credits towards their affordable housing obligation.

The Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey (SHA) has developed a Building Supportive Housing FAQ which addresses why and how municipalities can include supportive housing in their planning. Some towns have long understood the benefit of including supportive housing in their planning. In a June 2019 article in NJ Municipalities Magazine the Mayor of Allendale, and Bergen County’s United Way, a Developer, discuss key ingredients to their successful partnership to build special needs housing. The Township of Allendale’s housing plan and the Township of Cherry Hill’s housing plan include supportive housing developments.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition’s September 2021 Tenant Talk newsletter includes helpful information about universal design for seniors and people with disabilities (p.3), how people with can exercise their right to have their own home in their own communities (p. 7), Centers for Independent Living as an important resource and partner (p. 9), and a personal story about how housing leads to independence (12.)

SHA’s Housing Hub includes a variety of resources that people with disabilities and their families may find useful to understand and explore options for supportive housing and community living. They include a housing guide, housing videos, resource bulletins, a list of housing navigators available to guide individuals and families seeking housing for someone with special needs., a housing search tool and other resources.
Appendix A: The Integrated Community Project

The Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey led the Integrated Community Project (ICP) in partnership with the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities and the New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness. The work of the ICP began in January 2021 and spans a period of eighteen months.

The ICP conducted a series of focus groups with people with lived experience in Bergen, Camden, and Ocean Counties. Lived experience included having physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, having mental illness, being in recovery from substance abuse, aging, and/or having experienced homelessness. The focus groups informed the understanding of and how to address issues around integration and inclusion for individuals with disabilities and barriers.

Leadership Teams were formed in the same three counties. Individuals with lived experience were invited to join the Leadership Teams. They participated in a video that promotes the ICP and helped lead the work to develop the ICP Self-Assessment for municipalities and the strategy used to reach out to the nine identified municipalities.

The ICP Self-Assessment was used in meetings with nine municipalities. Based on what was learned from the municipalities in the Self-Assessment meetings, the content areas for the ICP Toolkit were determined. This Toolkit will be widely distributed to our ICP partners and the municipalities and through SHA’s communication channels including a press release, its newsletter, and social media.

The Inclusive Healthy Communities (IHC) Grant Program is designed to provide funding opportunities to communities and organizations in New Jersey to promote inclusive practices that support the health and well-being of individuals with disabilities in the communities where they live.
Grant Partners

The Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey
New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities
New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness

Partners

The Arc of Bergen and Passaic Counties
The Arc of Camden
Age Friendly Teaneck
Allendale Housing, Inc.
Bergen County
Bergen County Special Services School District
Bergen County’s United Way
The Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities
Camden Coalition
Camden County CIL
Camden County College Garden State Pathway Program
hip (Heightened Independence and Progress)
Disability Rights NJ
Jewish Association for Developmental Disabilities (J-ADD)
Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey
New Jersey State Independent Living Council (SILC)
Ocean County Department of Human Services Office for Individuals with Disabilities
Ocean Mental Health Services
Resources for Human Development
Triple C Housing
Municipalities That Have Completed the ICP Self-Assessment

Borough of Allendale
City of Camden*
Cherry Hill Township
Borough of Collingswood
City of Hackensack
Township of Lakewood
Lacey Township
Township of Teaneck
Township of Toms River

* Self-Assessment meeting to be scheduled
Learning From People With Lived Experience
Through Focus Groups and Leadership Teams

How to Learn About How Individuals with Disabilities and Barriers Feel and Don’t Feel Included in Your Community

Individuals with disabilities and barriers are the experts on how they do and do not feel included in the day-to-day life in their community. Inviting them to participate in focus groups and leadership teams or advisory committees is an excellent way to learn more about what your community is doing well around community integration and also where there is room for improvement.

Setting Up and Running Focus Groups

- Cast a wide net in outreach to individuals with lived experience with disabilities and barriers who live in your community and the agencies and organizations who serve them
- Invite individuals with lived experience to participate in one hour focus groups
- Create a flyer written in plain language to use for focus group recruitment. A sample flyer is included in the following page
- Decide how many focus groups to hold (three is often a good number)
- Groups of eight to ten people make an ideal size for a focus group
- Focus groups can be held virtually on zoom (and transcripts can be recorded) or in person
- Compensate focus group participants with a gift card and advertise this when recruiting focus group participants

You Held Your Focus Groups, Now What? How to Set Priorities and Create Leadership Teams

- Summarize your focus group findings
- Determine what the major themes are around barriers to community integration that individuals in your community face
- Use what you heard through the focus groups to prioritize areas where community integration might be improved
- Create Leadership Teams or Advisory Committees to guide your municipality’s community integration work. Invite individuals with lived experience to join teams and/or committees along with representatives from organizations who serve people with disabilities and barriers in your community (your local or regional partners in inclusion)
- Allow the expertise of people with lived experience to guide your community integration work
SHA-NJ Seeks Participation in Integrated Community Project Focus Group

The Integrated Community Project (ICP) is a project to expand the opportunities for people with disabilities to become fully involved in the activities of daily life in their cities and towns. To do this work, SHA-NJ will gather perspectives from people with disabilities living in our communities. Click here for a description of the focus groups and how to apply to join.

In the focus groups, we hope that you will tell us:

1. How cities and towns already involve people with disabilities in daily life in your communities
2. What is missing in your life in the city or town where you live
3. How cities and towns can do a better job in giving you connections to different parts of daily life

Who is SHA-NJ seeking to guide the work of the ICP?

Individuals who have different disabilities and/or face different barriers including any 1 or more of the following:

- Physical disabilities
- Intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Individuals who are aging
- Mental health and substance abuse disorders
- Individuals who experience homelessness

How to Apply to Join the ICP Focus Group

Requirements:

- Applicants must live or work in Bergen, Camden or Ocean County
- Complete & submit the focus group survey by 5:00 PM EDT on Friday, April 9, 2021

Use this Google Forms link to apply to join the focus group:

https://forms.gle/RaAQg9QzuQqNkhbS8

- All applicants be notified by Friday, April 23, 2021 whether they have been selected to participate.
- Two groups will be held in each County (Bergen, Camden, and Ocean)
- Focus groups may be convened virtually or in-person following the latest CDC protocols to accommodate the safety, needs, and/or preferences of all group participants.
- Group participants will be selected to ensure a variety of representation in each session
- Focus group participants will receive a gift card as a thank you for their time

If you know others who may be eligible to join, please share this focus group information page and application with them.

Do you have additional questions?
Please email Kate Kelly at kate.kelly@shanj.org

This initiative was funded by an Inclusive Healthy Communities Grant from the Division of Disability Services, New Jersey Department of Human Services.
Integrated Community Project Self-Assessment for Municipalities

Background Information
Why should our community assess itself around community integration and involvement? People with a variety of disabilities and/or who face barriers who live in our municipalities have talents to share and their contributions can strengthen and enhance our communities. There is an opportunity to begin to think about how better integration and involvement can include everyone. (Please see ICP Summary for more information about the project.)

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated barriers than many individuals face. Many individuals have experienced periods of long-term isolation, anxiety, and physical health challenges. While virtual meetings and activities have felt self-isolating to some individuals, for others, they have provided increased opportunities to feel involved in and connected to a community.

We must change our viewpoint on disability and individuals with a variety of abilities. The issue is a societal issue. The “problem” is located within society, not the individual. How do we begin to think about everyone, no matter their disabilities or barriers, not as members of separate groups but as simply members of their community?

Disabilities impact all of us, in every community:
- Nationally, 61 million adults, one out of four adults (26%) live with a disability.
- In New Jersey, this number is about the same, with one out of four adults (23%) having a disability.
- It is estimated that about 90% of all individuals will experience a temporary or permanent disability in their lifetime.

The highest percentage of adults with disabilities have mobility or cognitive challenges. However, there are additional disabilities and barriers such as physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, individuals struggling with mental health, substance abuse disorders, and individuals who experience homelessness, and/or individuals who are aging.

What does inclusion mean?
Inclusion means that individuals with or without disabilities and barriers can live, work, and play in their community. By improving inclusion for all, everyone can be involved and we can work together to continue to transform our communities into places where all members:

- Are presumed competent,
- Are recruited and welcome as valued members of their community,
- Fully participate and learn with their peers, and
- Experience reciprocal social relationships.

We recognize that there are things that municipalities already do to promote community involvement but we also anticipate that you will find areas in which you would like to improve.
Instructions for Completing Self-Assessment

The self-assessment’s goal is to help communities continue to identify ways they can help individuals to be fully involved in your community. The questions in this self-assessment came from the feedback about inclusion received from people with lived experience and leaders of organizations that support them.

In answering the series of questions, consider “all individuals” to refer to individuals with a variety of disabilities or barriers including a variety of physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, as well as individuals struggling with mental illness, substance abuse disorders, individuals who are aging, and/or who have experienced homelessness. We understand that you may not have responses to every question.

Upon completing the self-assessment, we will work with and support your municipality to provide resources and tools to create further opportunities for involvement in your community and address areas where you would like to improve. We will work with you to connect you with potential local partners who can help you in your work to improve opportunities for inclusion.

Introduction

- What might be some barriers that would prevent an individual from being involved in your community?
- In what ways have you intentionally welcomed people with disabilities to your community?
  - Outreach to organizations within your community that support people with disabilities
  - Extend a clear invitation to participate in activities to members of groups that support individuals with disabilities
  - Encourage all residents, no matter their disabilities or barriers to feel connected – please elaborate
  - Other _____
- In what ways have you welcomed (beyond giving assistance) to your community, people with barriers such as individuals who have experienced homelessness?
  - Activities are available free or charge and/or “scholarships” are provided
  - Activities occur at a variety of times to accommodate varied work schedules
  - Other ______
- Does the municipality have staff who are individuals with a variety of disabilities?
- Is someone on the municipality’s staff in a role dedicated to be a liaison between community and those who have varying disabilities and/or face barriers? Please elaborate

Recreation Activities and/or Clubs

- Are non-physical activities, clubs and recreational activities offered for those who have a variety of abilities and/or adults of all ages?
  - Are they offered at a variety of times and days of the week? Please elaborate
- Are parks, playgrounds and activity areas accessible to all (including adults who accompany children)?
  - Bathrooms and pathways accessible
  - Community gardens and/or craft tables are accessible
  - Facilities are well lit
  - They are offered a variety of times/days of the week – please elaborate
  - Equipped with hearing loop technology
  - Other ______
- Are recreation activities and clubs offered virtually and/or in-person? Please elaborate.
- Are there opportunities in your community for all who would like to share a talent or skill?
- How are people invited to share their talents and skills? Please elaborate
Cultural Activities

- Are opportunities open to individuals with a variety of disabilities in the community to enrich lives with music, other entertainment, culture, and continuing education opportunities?
  - Bathrooms and pathways accessible
  - Facilities are well lit
  - Offered a variety of times/days of the week – please elaborate
  - Facilities equipped with hearing loop technology
  - Other ______

- Are individuals with all abilities given the opportunity to share their talents in the areas of music, other entertainment, and/or cultural enrichment? Please answer yes/no. If yes, please elaborate.

Municipal Council and Committee Meetings

- Are all municipal meetings i.e., board of education, town council, planning, and zoning committee meetings accessible to individuals with a variety of disabilities?
  - Offered in-person
  - Offered virtually
  - Transcription and/or close captioning is provided for virtual events
  - Virtual meetings are recorded and recordings are accessible
  - Bathrooms and pathways accessible
  - Facilities are well lit
  - Offered a variety of times/days of the week – please elaborate
  - Equipped with hearing loop technology
  - Other ______

- Is information about when meetings occur clearly communicated?
  - How are the details about meetings and/or the regular meeting schedule communicated?
  - How much advance notice about meetings is given?

- People with a variety of disabilities in my community are:
  - Involved in municipal committees and commissions
  - Involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs and initiatives
  - Consulted or recruited to consult in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs and initiatives
  - If you answered yes to any of the above questions:
    - Are accommodations provided to prepare them for the meetings?
    - Is there cross-representation of people with a variety of disabilities?
    - Are the people with disabilities from diverse backgrounds and/or of different genders?

Advocacy, Leadership and Volunteer Opportunities

- Are there opportunities for all individuals to advocate for themselves and for social issues that are important to them?
  - Opportunities through an age-friendly initiative
  - Opportunities through a disability caucus or commission
  - Other ______

- Are leadership development programs i.e., internships (non-academic and academic) available to all individuals? How are these opportunities offered and communicated? Please elaborate
Advocacy, Leadership and Volunteer Opportunities (continued...)

- Are the following opportunities to volunteer in purpose driven activities available?
  - Local park or beach clean-ups
  - Serving at the library or community center
  - Other ______

- Related to advocacy, leadership, and volunteer opportunities, please check all that apply:
  - Meetings are offered in-person
  - Meetings are offered virtually
  - Bathrooms and pathways accessible
  - Facilities are well lit
  - They are offered a variety of times/days of the week – please elaborate
  - Facilities are equipped with hearing loop technology
  - Transcription and/or close captioning of meetings is provided for virtual events
  - Virtual meetings are recorded and recordings are accessible
  - Other ______

Who are your partners in inclusion?

- Have your first responders and/or staff had access to training and resources around how to assist people with disabilities?
- Are there organizations that you partner with that serve individuals with disabilities?
  - Schools
  - Healthcare institutions
  - Centers for Independent Living
  - Other ______

Communication

- Does the municipality ask residents with all abilities how they would like to receive communication? Please elaborate.
- If an individual is new to your municipality, which social media sites/groups should they join to use as one way to learn about events and activities in town?
- What communication channels and/or vehicles are used to publicize events and activities in your municipality?
  - Flyers posted in public spaces i.e. libraries and grocery stores? If yes, are these flyers written in plain language? In braille? In a variety of languages?
  - Social Media such as facebook? If yes, are their facebook pages that offer service such as mutual aid?
  - Through a social platform such as Nextdoor
  - An electronic billboard in the center of town that publicizes events and activities
  - Local newspapers and magazines
  - Emergency radio station
  - Local cable access channel
  - Nixle
  - Word of mouth/grassroots networks
  - Other ______
Transportation

• What accessible transportation is available to all individuals who would like to participate in activities are available to individuals in our municipality?
  o Access Link (through NJ Transit)
  o Community ride sharing
  o Transportation vouchers and/or other reimbursement
  o Ride sharing platforms i.e., Uber and Lyft
  o NJ Transit
  o Para Transit
  o Willing to Go program
  o Shuttle services offered through the municipality, housing provider, or other entity?
  o County provided transportation services
  o Other __________

• How is information about accessible transportation shared though the municipality?
  o On social media
  o In newsletters
  o Other

• What percentage of your community is walkable with sidewalks? Do you have a process for the evaluation of and maintenance of sidewalks?

Conclusion

• What things is your municipality doing to promote inclusion and involvement? What did we forget to ask you about?

The goal of the Integrated Community Project is to increase the capacity of people with disabilities and barriers to become completely engaged in their communities.

This initiative was funded by an Inclusive Healthy Communities Grant from the Division of Disability Services, New Jersey Department of Human Services.