

Room for change.

Meeting the Housing Needs of People with Disabilities
A Housing Research Project of Disability Network/Lakeshore

In Ottawa County, people with disabilities struggle to find affordable housing near appropriate resources. In addition, physically accessible options and the availability of supports that allow individuals to live independently are significantly lacking. In an effort to identify the true need and offer solutions, a team of community stakeholders set out to answer the following questions: What are the current and projected unmet housing needs for people with mental illness, developmental, physical, and other disabilities? What impact do affordability, accessibility, individual supports, and public amenities have on an individual's ability to obtain desired housing?

PHASE 1: What We Already Know

Collecting demographics, exploring existing studies, and identifying best practices

PHASE 2: An Organizational View

Surveying stakeholder groups and service providers

PHASE 3: Housing Realities

Listening to people with disabilities, their family members, and caregivers

PHASE 4: Creating And Testing Solutions

Compiling findings and developing solutions to share with the community

PHASE 5: Reporting Results

Sharing findings and suggested solutions with decision makers

PHASE 6: Next Steps

Organizing a collaborative of community members to implement solutions

22,309

the number of people with disabilities who live in Ottawa County

176

service providers and government officials who participated in an on-line survey

78%

people with disabilities who are unemployed or not in the labor force

51%

the unemployment rate for people with disabilities

34

community members participated in a focus group

\$16,345

the median income for people with disabilities compared to \$26,750 for those without disabilities

281

community members, service providers and government officials discussed housing solutions

Defining the Issues

Based on past housing service requests by people with disabilities, the research team developed the following four components to assess current and projected housing needs.

Individual Supports:

supports that are necessary for independent living, both natural and paid, are specific to an individual's needs and allow for full participation at home, work, and in the community

Affordability:

housing available in one's location of choice, and at a cost, including associated expenses, that does not exceed 30% of the individual's and/or household's income

Accessibility:

the choice of housing near appropriate resources and supports that is barrier free, both in the home and around the community, and that meets the current and future needs of its residents

Public Amenities:

services and facilities within one's community that enhance living and allow for maximum independence

Survey Responses

Service providers indicated their clients have the following needs and interests.

Clients are seeking the following types of housing options:

66% low income, subsidized rental/apartment units

48% group homes

40% rental apartments meeting accessibility guidelines

39% single family rental homes

Barriers in obtaining accessible housing:

84% affordability

69% transportation

68% availability

64% location in relation to needed amenities and services

Access to public amenities is limited by:

62% cost

61% transportation

42% limited supports

32% time of day needed

Community supports:

64% believe their clients have little or no knowledge of available supports

46% stated that their clients rarely find affordable housing that allows access to supports

27% believe supports are somewhat unavailable or not at all available

Affordable & accessible housing:

- When affordable housing is available, it is often in areas with high crime. Affordable options often become unaffordable once utility, accessibility, transportation, and healthcare costs are included.
- There is a severe lack of available housing with barrier-free entries.

Housing Realities: Community Voices

In terms of affordability, the key issues expressed were getting needed education or training, maintaining stable employment, and the acceptance of Section 8 vouchers by a wider range of housing providers:

"I felt like I lost my independence when I became disabled – if someone would just help me get an education/gainful employment, I wouldn't need state services or money. I could begin contributing to the community again. My hopes, dreams, friends, and relationships have suffered."

Much of the housing currently available feels exclusive to people with disabilities who desire to be involved in the surrounding community. Group homes that intentionally facilitate companionship for their residents both inside and outside of the homes themselves are hard to find:

"Both children have a syndrome that's musculoskeletal – they will need someone to help make decisions and care for them (as they age). They will need different housing situations at (various) points. The only housing available currently for this situation would be a nursing home."

Lack of needed supports, accessibility, affordability and positive relation to the broader community with consideration for the wide variety of disabilities types, including physical, emotional, and cognitive disabilities, and severity of those disabilities is not represented in policy, programs, and funding streams:

"My two kids have different needs due to cognitive abilities. My daughter could live independently if there was support, i.e. eating nutritiously, cleaning, paying bills, and help socializing. She needs access to peers."



Creating Solutions and Testing

Shared findings with the broader community and gained feedback.

Overarching philosophy

A consumer driven model that frames services, policies, and programs will be most effective in achieving desired change.

Individual Supports

Solution 1: Empower individuals to choose the support that best meets their needs by educating individuals and service providers about available supports and developing additional supports to fit unmet needs.

Solution 2: Expand advocacy and collaboration to increase awareness and existence of support services.

- Collaboration is needed among state and local governments, faith-based organizations, non-profit service providers, and community members
- HMIS, 211 or a related system could serve as central repository for support service awareness and provision

Public Amenities

Solution: Expand public transit options in Ottawa County and improve accessibility of public facilities.

Affordability

Solution: Increase awareness and availability of affordable housing and housing assistance resources.

- Awareness needed by builders, landlords, realtors and residents
- Assistance resources include support for rehabbing and building housing units, bill payment assistance, etc.

Accessibility

Solution: Provide education to increase the availability of both accessible housing structures and accessible communities.

- Education is needed among the community, landlords, realtors and area builders
- Education is needed about the benefits of accessible housing and the options (funding, zoning, ADA requirements) available to create and rehab accessible housing and communities

Policy

Solution: Change how the disability community is broadly perceived with the goal of reframing policies, programs and funding streams.

- Recognizing the diversity within the disability community



Reporting Results

Present study findings and solutions to community leaders and elected officials in order to increase awareness of the need for affordable, accessible housing with access to public amenities and community supports.

Next Steps

Establish a collaborative of partners and community members to explore funding options and develop plans to implement solutions.

Thank you.

Housing Action Team Members

Virginia Parish Beard
Hope College

Anna Bednarek
Ottawa County Community
Mental Health

Jeannette Brownson
Summit Properties

Michele Chaney
United Federal Credit Union

Albert Doorn
Ottawa County Community
Mental Health

Christine Fritz
MOKA

Bob Karsten
Ottawa County Board of
Commissioners

Sandy Keirman
Disability Network/Lakeshore

Mark Kornelis
Ottawa County Community
Action Agency

Susan March
Ottawa County Intermediate School
District

Krista Mason
Benjamin's Hope

Laurie Miedema
The Holland Deacons Conference

Stacy Pacanowski
Heritage Homes

Stacey Trowbridge
Disability Network/Lakeshore

Brian Vork
70 times 7 Life Recovery

For more information, please contact Disability Network Lakeshore at 616.396.5326. Full research reports are available at www.dnlakeshore.org.

