

Inclusive Housing Starts with Inclusive Planning: Engaging Individuals with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities

By: Carter Burton

Getting in The Know

As of 2016, there were nearly 2.5 million persons living with a disability in the State of Florida, including those with impairments in hearing, vision, cognitive ability, mobility, or other difficulty living independently. In Florida, 55% of the general population is employed; among those with disabilities, the employment rate is only 19%. About 80% of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities lack gainful employment to help support themselves financially.

We know that, depending on the disability, an individual may not have the physical or cognitive ability to perform in certain capacities of employment. Consistent with Florida statistics, a 2016 economic news release by the Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that “persons with a disability were less likely to be employed than those with no disability.” Further, the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC) 2015 analysis, “Housing: Serving the Diverse Needs of the Community of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities in a Dynamic Environment,” determined that those with developmental disabilities face especially complex barriers to finding affordable, accessible, inclusive housing.



The Importance of Affordable, Accessible, Inclusive Housing

1. Many persons with special needs are low income. Further, many of those with a disability may rely solely on supplemental security incomes (SSI) of \$750 monthly to cover living costs including housing, food, transportation, and essential services. In addition,

according to “The State of the States in Developmental Disabilities,” there are more than 75,000 Floridians with intellectual or developmental disabilities who live with family members and have a caregiver age 60 or over. Therefore, it is likely that within the next few years many of those individuals will need to transition from family care to facility or group home based care.

2. Currently there are only two state developmental disabilities centers and 86 intermediate care facilities in Florida, which are typically at capacity. It is also important that individuals living with disabilities be housed in the least restrictive and most independent environment possible. The shortage of affordable, accessible, inclusive housing in Florida only exacerbates the challenges faced by those with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
3. Additional options are needed to provide access to affordable integrated housing for people living with disabilities. These options could be in the form of federal, state, or local housing subsidies; designated housing choice vouchers through housing authorities; or land use and zoning policy revisions at the local level to incentivize the integration of private group homes. Local government leadership has never been more critical, starting with community-based planning efforts guiding affordable housing strategies.

Inclusive Community Engagement Is Key!

Community-based planning is a primary method for prioritizing and allocating funding at the local level. All



municipalities and counties engage in community-based planning to address local challenges. A major element of community-based planning is community engagement. The Florida Housing Coalition (FHC) team of experts has facilitated numerous public meetings, focus groups, stakeholder meetings, and public hearings in support of local planning efforts. Affordable housing is almost always the leading topic of discussion.

However, we find that special needs populations, such as individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, tend to be underrepresented during the planning process. In the absence of the voiced concerns of those with disabilities, it is not uncommon that this population's need for affordable, accessible, inclusive housing fails to be identified as a high priority in the local planning process.

Public opinion is a strong voice for driving policy, so participation in community-based planning is vital to influencing local funding decisions. Though federal regulations require inclusion of special needs populations in the planning process, such as community participation requirements for HUD's Consolidated Plan and Fair Housing plans, this guidance may not be enough. It is essential that local government officials, residents, service providers, and advocates take an active role in conveying the importance of engagement in planning efforts and that each party take responsibility for its role in the process.

FHC Advocacy Efforts

FHC is partnering with the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council (FDDC) to develop a Community-Based Housing Initiatives Study. This partnership will provide an opportunity to determine local methods currently in place to engage in the planning process those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Best practices for community engagement will be identified to enhance local strategic planning.

The study will focus on two main outcomes: 1) inform those with intellectual and developmental disabilities so they can better navigate and engage in the community planning process; and 2) recommend strategies to monitor and influence existing initiatives intended to increase the availability of, and access to, affordable and inclusive housing.

The Community-Based Housing Initiatives Study will be a useful tool for individuals, service providers, and local governments to increase the representation of those with intellectual and developmental disabilities in all facets of the planning process. The Study will also highlight housing challenges relevant to decision makers administering housing funds and bring those issues to the forefront of local funding and planning efforts.

Join us at our 2018 Annual Conference where we have dedicated an entire caucus to this topic. [HNN](#)



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