



Research &
Training Center on
Community Living

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION RESEARCH PROJECT

PARTNERS IN RESEARCH

The Research & Training Center on Community Living is grateful to the many staff from centers for independent living and other community-based organizations and the consumers who partner on our research to enhance community living.

Here is one partner's story.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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PARTNER SUCCESS STORY: CAROL CONFORTI-ADAMS

"I think it was instrumental to have these folks bring the Community Engagement Initiative to our community because we wouldn't have thought of doing this before. The CEI project was just one element of the many things the advisory council was doing, but now it is part of our regular agenda each month."

- Carol Conforti-Adams, M.Ed.
Director, Sunset Hill Educational Institute,
New Hampshire

RESEARCH IN ACTION

For people with disabilities living in one rural New Hampshire town*, the options for healthcare and recreation are limited. The community of 5,000 has no health center, no doctor, only one small market and limited public transportation.

So when Carol Conforti-Adams at Sunset Hill Educational Institute received an invitation to participate in the Community Engagement Initiative (CEI) Knowledge Translation Research Project, she signed on. The CEI provides a four-step process for identifying local barriers that people with disabilities experience, then working with others in the community to resolve those barriers.

Conforti-Adams and the CEI team of community partners and volunteers were one of eight community-based organizations that took part in the research project – four in New Hampshire and four in Montana. They worked with Charles Drum, PhD, Tom Seekins, PhD, and Sara Rainer to implement the CEI's grassroots techniques in their communities.

Research has already shown that the CEI is an effective tool for communities to identify and resolve barriers to healthcare. Recreation was a new subject for this trial. "It's well established that there are significant disparities in accessing healthcare for people with disabilities, and the importance of recreation opportunities figures in – not just around physical activity and health and wellness, but also because of the social participation value of recreation opportunities," said Drum.

In addition, the researchers had another goal in this project: to learn how much training and technical assistance community members need to successfully implement the CEI process – to translate knowledge into action. So they divided the participating communities into three groups that received different amounts of assistance: intensive, moderate and minimal. Conforti-Adams and her team were in the minimal assistance group, which meant they only received a how-to CEI manual and resources on the CEI website, but no in-person training or technical assistance.

The community was highly motivated, though, and found enough guidance in the CEI training materials to address the city's transportation issues. The neighboring town had a bus that picked up senior citizens in town once a week to take them to a meal site. The team worked with the local transit system to expand the bus service to include people with disabilities and to add a second weekly stop in town.

"Now people could go into Concord for two hours to see a doctor, and they could shop at bigger grocery stores where they get more for their dollar," Conforti-Adams said.

Even better, their advocacy led to a major success right in town: the local community center purchased an accessible 14-passenger van.

"I think the stars were all in line for this project because I had just gotten a job in this town, and as a person with C6-C7 spinal cord injury, I have an investment in disability awareness and community access," said Conforti-Adams.

**The name of the town will remain anonymous until an article about this research is printed in a scholarly journal.*



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