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UNHs Institute On Disability Working To Make Granite State Communities Accessible

Erika Mantz

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UNH's Institute On Disability Working To Make Granite State Communities Accessible

Contact: [Erika Mantz](#)
603-862-1567
UNH Media Relations

Aug. 4, 2005

DURHAM, N.H. – A federal grant awarded to the state as part of President's Bush New Freedom Initiative of 2001 allowed the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire to work with the town of Littleton to develop a "model community" for keeping people with disabilities and long-term illnesses in their community.

The goal of the initiative was to encourage persons who are aging and others with disabilities to fully participate in community life by creating and maintaining an infrastructure free of physical, social, policy, and attitudinal barriers. New Hampshire proposed initiating a comprehensive approach to systems change by establishing a "model community" - a community that is an example that guides other communities; includes all its citizens, regardless of age or ability; provides choice for all citizens who need long-term support in order to live independently; and encourages citizens to participate in business, civic, volunteer, and social opportunities - and Littleton was chosen.

The town of Littleton is a community of about 5,800 people in northwestern New Hampshire. The grant brought together representatives from the disability, business, education, public service, and health communities to address disability issues from a community planning perspective.

The town of Littleton, in collaboration with the North Country Health Consortium, managed the project with the help of a full-time project coordinator. In its first three years of operation, the Littleton Model Community Project focused efforts in several key areas of community life. Community leaders sought to gain a greater understanding of the needs of the community through surveys, interviews, and analysis of physical accessibility of town offices and downtown businesses, with an emphasis on community-based solutions. Some of these solutions included working with local businesses to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities, working with town recreation staff to create inclusive recreational opportunities, and developing a Time Dollars program to share the gifts and talents of community members. Efforts were also made to make the town's offices, programs, and printed materials more accessible, as well as local businesses.

This project was funded through a 2002 Real Choice Systems Change Grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Funding was for \$2.3 million for three years (all federal funds). The state of N.H., Department of Health and Human Services was awarded the grant and contracted with the IOD at UNH to

manage the project. The DHHS provided 5 percent matching funds.

For more information contact: Susan Fox, 228-2084, swfox@unh.edu or Nicole Lapointe, 444-0615 x 225, nlapointe@nchcnh.org