On behalf of the University of Rhode Island College of Pharmacy Rhodes to Independence Steering Committee and stakeholders, it is with much pleasure that I invite you to read the Annual Report of the Rhodes to Independence's (RTI) accomplishments and activities during 2005.

During this past year RTI continued its progress toward systems’ change in support of its goal to support people with disabilities in securing and sustaining competitive employment in integrated settings.

As you read our 2005 Annual Report, you will note the continuing progress of some of our established “pathways to independence” and new initiatives as well. Though the initial scope of our RTI activities had been to successfully modify Rhode Island’s health care delivery system to meet the needs of people with disabilities who want to work (primarily focused on Medicaid eligibility), our current efforts are much broader. There can be no doubt that barriers to employment, self-sufficiency and independence cross beyond health care to transportation, housing and the lack of information regarding benefits and supports. In fact, the RTI project has expanded its role far beyond the scope of the original grant to become involved in initiatives and special projects as they arise or as issues need to be addressed in a real-time fashion.

I believe that 2005 was a productive and exciting year for Rhodes to Independence. You may be familiar with some of our initiatives – and may recognize the names and affiliations of our Steering Committee, Workgroup members and staff whose dedication and diligence continues to improve the quality of life for Rhode Islanders with disabilities, their families and communities. I invite you to visit our website at www.rhodestoindependence.org for more information on our activities, initiatives and resources.

I hope that you share our pride in the 2005 accomplishments that are the result of the vibrant collaboration that sparks the Rhodes to Independence initiative. Together with our many partners and participants, we will continue to build upon these efforts and work together to create a climate in Rhode Island that provides the possibility of the highest quality of life for its citizens with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Steven H. Kitchin
Chairman
Rhodes to Independence
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Rhodes to Independence (RTI) was launched in 2000 as a result of the state being awarded four grants in support of initiatives that would assist people with disabilities and senior citizens to live independently in the community. Since then, the Rhodes project has worked toward its goal to make system changes that will reduce barriers to independence. Rhodes to Independence operates under the aegis of the University of Rhode Island’s College of Pharmacy. Through its oversight Steering Committee, we have brought together in Rhode Island for the first time a myriad of agencies, advocacy groups, non-profit organizations, employers, workforce leadership, educational institutions, legislators and other key stakeholders in a collaborative entity with the common goal of supporting people with disabilities in attaining and retaining competitive employment.

Building upon its first four years’ accomplishments, Rhodes to Independence continues to make systems changes to facilitate the competitive employment of people with disabilities by removing employment barriers for people with disabilities and providing leadership for a comprehensive employment systems infrastructure. RTI goals over the next four years include enhancements to the ability of the system to provide adequate health coverage and other needed supports for people with disabilities who are, or would like to be, competitively employed.

Rhodes to Independence, as it started its research identifying gaps and barriers to employment for working-aged people with disabilities, discovered that it was insufficient to focus on just getting and retaining jobs. For example, the basic needs of people with disabilities such as, health care, education, support services, housing, and transportation are critical factors in obtaining employment. Socio-economic and health care issues and concerns that exist for many Rhode Islanders are exponentially experienced by most people with disabilities. Without a home and transportation, it is almost impossible for any person to keep a job. Less than half of all people with disabilities in the state live in owner-occupied housing; many citizens with disabilities have the additional challenge of finding an accessible apartment or house. Accessible transportation, public or private, that can reliably take a worker with disabilities to and from work every work day is just not readily available.

Current programs and services for Rhode Islanders with disabilities often utilize the traditional approach toward disability which places an emphasis on individual challenges/barriers; a focus on what can/cannot be accomplished due to a disability; the need for “specialized” services; based on type or severity of disability. Rhodes to Independence expands these traditional views through a more comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach that focuses on the interaction of disability with social, environmental, economic and cultural factors; including the impact these factors can have on public policy. RTI enhances current programs and services with the ability to address and remove barriers for people with disabilities at multiple levels (individual through environmental) rather than the current approaches that tend to emphasize specific barriers (individual or environmental barriers).

Through the years of its existence, Rhode to Independence has built partnerships that previously did not exist in the state and has measurably improved employment and health care supports for Rhode Islanders with disabilities. There is no secret to the source of our success – it is the result of an established process in which consumers and other stakeholder input is valued and used to structure activities to help address the employment needs of and maximize supports for people with disabilities. The many partnerships which include consumers, state agencies, advocacy organizations, employers and others have resulted in a strategic collaboration that leverages resources and community involvement to produce positive employment and enhanced quality of life outcomes.

As this year’s Annual Report describes, not all our activities have stayed the same. We have forged a variety of pathways over time and emerged as a force for real change in Rhode Island. As you read this report, it is our hope that we can bring to you a better understanding not only of what we do but the very real ways in which our initiatives are of value to Rhode Islanders with disabilities.
Background & Overview

Background

More than 50 million people - one out of every five Americans - have a disability. A significant proportion lives at or below the poverty level, with nearly 40 percent of working-aged people with disabilities living in poverty. Americans with disabilities are the poorest minority group in the country. In Rhode Island, the poverty rate of working aged people with disabilities increased from 25.7 percent in 2003 to 26.5 percent in 2004; the percentage of working age individuals reporting a disability increased from 12.3 percent in 2003 to 12.5 percent in 2004. Less than half of working aged Rhode Islanders with disabilities were employed. Among non-white individuals, the incidence of disabilities soars along with the concomitant barriers to employment, health care and quality of life. What makes having a disability distinctive is that, anyone might acquire a disability at some point in life. Through aging, illness or accident, it is the only minority that any one of us can become a member of at any time.

For any person, good health is requisite for basic quality of life and the ability to make a living. Many people with disabilities have chronic, and often complex, health care needs. As indicated, there are thousands of Rhode Islanders with disabilities who live at or below the poverty level and those who are eligible may apply for and receive Medicaid coverage. There is a paradox built into this critical benefit, in order to continue to be covered, Medicaid beneficiaries cannot have earnings that exceed a very low threshold without losing their insurance yet, in order to work, they need to have access to cost-free or very inexpensive continuous medical services.

For a significant proportion of this population, Medicare benefits are also received 24 months after they become eligible for Social Security Disability Income. Yet, to receive this benefit, an individual must be certified as significantly disabled, which forms a very real barrier to perceiving oneself as able to try to become competitively employed. As children with disabilities transition from school and achieve adulthood, they lose the support programs specifically earmarked for childhood. For these young people, as well as many adults newly disabled, there are significant information gaps regarding available independent living options, health and employment supports and programs. Perhaps most important of all, health care and service providers, employers and many of the general public have preconceived negative attitudes relative to disabilities that become the most insidious of all barriers to leading productive quality lives.

To address many of these challenges for people with disabilities in Rhode Island, Rhodes to Independence was created in 2000 through the award of a federal Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG). The MIG’s goal is to support people with disabilities in securing and sustaining competitive employment in an integrated setting. Since its inception, RTI has worked toward systems’ change in support of this goal. Though the initial scope of the federal MIG has been to successfully modify states’ health care delivery systems to meet the needs of people with disabilities who want to work. Rhodes to Independence, through its Steering Committee, has become much broader in scope.

The Rhodes to Independence Steering Committee has served as the sounding board and processor of information regarding barriers and solutions to those barriers to enable people with disabilities to become competitively employed. Goals and objectives were developed to deal with the current reality of our statewide systems for people with disabilities. Workgroups created by the Steering
Committee conduct a more in-depth analysis of specific key barriers and system redesign for individuals with disabilities seeking employment. These Workgroups address the barriers to employment including: (1) a disjointed system in which coordination and communication is often difficult to provide individuals with accurate and easily understood information on programs and services available, (2) economic disincentives that make accessing support services and health care difficult to provide the appropriate health insurance that will aid people with disabilities in entering or maintaining employment, (3) a shortage of accessible transportation, and (4) a need for accurate information and services for employers to be able to easily hire and retain a person with a disability. The Steering Committee has also provided the leadership for timely and innovative approaches to issues as they arise. For example, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Rhodes to Independence facilitated an Emergency Management Planning meeting which brought state agencies, advocacy groups and consumers together to determine what is and what is not in place throughout the state to address emergency planning for individuals with disabilities.

Though decision-making takes place in the Steering Committee, it is the various Workgroups that conduct more in-depth analyses of specific key barriers for individuals with disabilities seeking employment. Through annual strategic planning, the Steering Committee identifies specific areas to target. These have included transportation, employee retention, outreach, and youth in transition. It is a key capability of the Steering Committee to take a good look at the issues confronting people with disabilities. Our participation in the Governor’s Commission on Disabilities Public Forums every summer has proved to be a valuable resource in hearing current concerns directly from people with disabilities in Rhode Island.

Overview

In 2005 Rhodes to Independence entered the fifth year of our eight-year grant and with it brought fresh approaches to addressing barriers to well-being and independence for working-aged adults with disabilities. As it does each year, the Steering Committee tapped into its broad representation to focus in on where it will put its efforts. The 2005 plan marked the first year that the Steering Committee included in its planning process the development of a logic model that would clearly make the link between our activities and how they will lead to the outcomes that best serve our mission. Through Steering Committee input and application of the logic model, the Steering Committee, while continuing the existence of its Transportation, Housing and Youth in Transition Workgroups, created a new Diversity Workgroup. As noted above, the incidence rate of disability among minority groups and people from traditionally under-served communities is significantly higher than among the white populations. This striking fact was enough for the Steering Committee to determine that it was important to understand the reasons for this and identify how best to build communication bridges and pathways.

Beyond the establishment and continuation of Workgroups, we worked in partnership with employers to continue support for the RI Business Leadership Network and – in collaboration with netWORKri – planned and implemented an immensely successful Job Fair in November.

Highlights of 2005

We are proud to share some highlights of Rhodes to Independence accomplishments in 2005. These are all in accordance with the 2005 Plan of Action we submitted to our grantor, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Greater details can be found in the specific Workgroup reports that follow.
Health Care
The passage of the Sherlock Plan (the “Medicaid Buy-In”) in 2004 was a great step forward for workers with disabilities. The ability to successfully implement the program and have the necessary data collection elements in place to evaluate the program is of equal importance. The Steering Committee is committed to assisting Medicaid management to implement data collection criteria for the Sherlock Plan and design enrollee tracking systems that will provide the information to evaluate the program. In 2005, we hired a consultant and worked in collaboration with the Department of Human Services to ensure that all required data collection and reporting elements were developed. When the program is up and running it will be vital to evaluate its impact on both the people for whom it is designed and on overall state expenditures.

Access to health care services and insurance coverage are essential to all people. For those with chronic health care needs this is an especially critical area. Research provides the basis for policy development regarding people with chronic conditions as well as improving health care access and quality. The continued analysis of the Rhode Island Medicare/Medicaid linked data base and initiation of other research activities are tools that will ultimately provide a basis for future strategies to bridge gaps and reduce barriers for people with disabilities to access health care.

Housing
Without a home, it is almost impossible for any person to keep a job. There is an established need to remove barriers preventing people with disabilities from residing in the community, improve capacity and access to affordable / accessible housing that is coordinated with long-term care support, and provide support in navigation of the housing system. To better identify housing gaps and barriers, our Housing workgroup conducted two focus groups (27 total participants). The Workgroup’s findings of the Housing Focus Group Report demonstrated the need for increased home modifications options as a critical factor in providing Rhode Islanders with disabilities the choice to live independently in their communities. Based on these findings, the Housing Workgroup identified the goal and provided an in-depth issue brief supporting the development of legislation for a Home Modifications Loan Program for individuals with disabilities and the elderly.

Information and Outreach
If people are uninformed concerning the existing resources, supports and programs, obviously their efficacy is extremely limited. Promotion of these supports and benefits is a major goal of RTI. Various forms of outreach materials have been developed in order to get accurate information to citizens concerning Rhodes’ activities, as well as, state and federal programs available regarding work incentives and support services. Last year, Rhodes’ staff, Steering Committee and Workgroup members delivered presentations and were represented on panels around the state speaking and answering questions regarding the Sherlock Plan and areas such as transportation and youths with disabilities transitioning from high school to work or further education. We were also listening to individuals concerns. By attending the Governor’s Commission on Disabilities Public Forums and just talking with consumers and their advocates, we gather information that is utilized in formulating Rhodes’ initiatives and activities.

Pathways to information on the internet were also improved as we worked together with the Department of Human Services and Crossroads RI to expand and improve the Crossroads resource directory for all citizens. In particular, adding resources and accessibility information for people with disabilities. Additionally, our own website was expanded and improved as well.
Employment and Training
To a great extent, it has been the workforce engine that has propelled Rhodes to Independence. As employment of people with disabilities is a central focus of our mission, employers and workforce entities such as the Chambers of Commerce and the State Workforce Investment Boards continue to be important partners. In 2005, the Steering Committee and RTI staff assisted with the ongoing development of the Rhode Island Business Leadership Network (BLN) through providing resources and facilitation support.

The Autumn Job Fair was one of our big successes last year. In partnership with netWORKri, we co-sponsored the first annual Autumn Job Fair celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Nearly 500 job seekers, many with disabilities attended and 25 employers participated.

Traditionally Under-served Populations with Disabilities
As previously noted, Rhode Islanders from traditionally under-served populations have higher rates of disability and are disproportionately affected in the key areas of employment, health care, housing and transportation. Many of these individuals are members of minority groups. The Steering Committee in 2005 decided to form a Diversity Workgroup, which would identify barriers in these communities and suggest outreach and effective communication strategies for these communities and populations. Workgroup members included representatives from a range of traditionally under-served communities, state agencies, non-profit organizations, advocacy groups and consumers. They identified a common thread of obstacles that exist, in part, due to a lack of cultural sensitivity and greater need for increased significant community education, awareness and inclusion. Presentations by representatives of vulnerable communities also highlighted unique cultural and socioeconomic situations and issues.

Transportation
Accessible transportation, public or private, that can reliably take a worker with disabilities to and from work every work day is just not readily available in Rhode Island. This continues to be a major barrier to independence and employment. To address this issue, the Steering Committee and Transportation Workgroup continued to brainstorm strategies to enhance existing transportation options and services in support of people with disabilities who are employed and those who would like to work, and to explore innovative programs that have been implemented elsewhere and might be duplicated in Rhode Island. In 2005, many new Workgroup members came to the table.

The Workgroup explored the existence and effects of indirect and direct transportation costs and services in Rhode Island. Thinking outside the box characterized the Workgroup’s approach as it examined best practices around the country in terms of private-public partnerships and non-profit programs that might be adapted in Rhode Island.
Increasingly, the Rhodes to Independence Steering Committee has become both a catalyst for action and a facilitator for a broader scope of initiatives that would help people with disabilities and senior citizens to live independently in the community and maximize their quality of life. Rhodes to Independence has offered leadership in the following special initiatives in 2005.

**Emergency Management Planning**

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, planning for and facilitation of an Emergency Management Planning meeting to conduct an environmental scan in order to determine what is in place throughout the state to address emergency planning for individuals with disabilities in Rhode Island. Representatives of key state emergency management officials, agencies, the Governor's office, legislators and consumers met to discuss the current emergency management response plan for the state.

**People with Disabilities as Informed Participants in the Electoral Process**

The Steering Committee became a founding member of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)'s RI affiliate's Disability Vote Project. The RI Disability Vote Project's emphasis is on getting eligible voters registered and to the polls and on educating people with disabilities on key issues. The Rhodes' Project Director is participating in the planning for this important initiative.

**Collaboration with other Rhode Island Agencies to Expand Affordable and Accessible Housing**

Adopting the principle of “the rising tide lifts all boats”, Rhodes to Independence became a member of Housing-WorksRI Coalition. Its goal is to end the shortage of quality affordable housing for everyone. Though the affordable housing shortage affects most state residents, people with disabilities tend to have even greater housing challenges than other Rhode Islanders.

Partnership with the Department of Human Services to enhance the Rhode Island Resource Directory

Rhodes to Independence identified 150 additional disability resources for the Resource Directory (based on the Crossroads RI listings) and developed an accessibility template that was sent to all organizations listed in the current Crossroads directory.
The goal of the Rhodes to Independence Diversity Workgroup is to reduce and overcome barriers to employment for traditionally under-served populations with disabilities that exist due to a lack of cultural sensitivity and greater need for increased significant community education, awareness and involvement. The Workgroup’s Guiding Principles are:

1. All strategies and activities will be inclusive of under-served populations spanning – but not necessarily limited to – race, ethnicity, gender, immigrant status, residents of under-served geographical regions.
2. Positive relationships that engender trust and respect will be developed in communities / among relevant groups including community leaders, faith-based organizations, physicians, social workers, etc., in order to increase awareness of rights to services and support to individuals with disabilities.
3. Critical communication barriers will be reduced through increased awareness of cultural issues and linguistic differences that will help people with disabilities to better access services, occupational training and employment opportunities.

The Diversity Workgroup includes members representing state agencies, non-profit organizations, advocacy groups and consumers. The Workgroup met five times throughout the year.

Accomplishments
The Diversity Workgroup’s 2005 accomplishments include the following.

• Provided background information on the scope of concern and statistics on people with disabilities from traditionally under-served communities as well as an overview of the Rehabilitation Act and the two amendments that are applicable to these populations.
• Developed the mission statement and guiding principles for the Workgroup.
• In order to identify gaps and barriers to the employment of, and access to health care for people with disabilities in vulnerable communities, presentations by representatives of the following Rhode Island communities took place:

The Hispanic Community
Key Findings

• The Hispanic population is concentrated in Providence, Pawtucket and Central Falls; 4.6% of the Cranston population identify themselves as Hispanic.
• A critical issue for Hispanic education is that the high school completion rate is 63% compared to 83% for whites.

Another critical area is health care where there is a disparity: 35% of Hispanics lack health insurance; the population has three times the incidence of health problems and disabilities as the general population.

In terms of business, many in the Hispanic community have small businesses and are visible on Broad Street, but there are barriers in obtaining capital to sustain business and there are also problems in maintaining and expanding businesses.

In terms of housing, there has been improvement but there is still a disparity: 48.1% of Hispanics are homeowners compared with 65.4% of other populations nationwide. The ability to buy a home is correlated with the ability to generate income, and many times the age of a person is a key variable.

The Asian Community
Key Findings

• There are approximately 12,000 Asians in Rhode Island. Most live in Providence, South Providence and the West End.
In terms of education, the challenge is getting through middle school.

There is a big gap due to the fact students do not pass on information from school to their parents, so there it is difficult for parents to communicate with the schools.

A major barrier is language. There are not many translation services that speak Asian languages.

While there is no statistical data available on the percentage of people with disabilities in the Asian population, there is documentation concerning a disparity in health care in general and disability services specifically. In particular, the language barrier is critical in the context of communicating medical problems to providers.

The Native American Community in Rhode Island

Key Findings

- Two-thirds of the Narragansett Tribe reside in Providence, Newport and Pawtucket.
- Top four disabilities for Native Americans are diabetes, learning disabilities, depression, and alcohol and drug abuse. Among minorities, this population has the highest suicide, unemployment and major disabilities rates. Many are poor.
- A recent East Pequot survey of Connecticut and Rhode Island tribes indicated that there are few Native Americans who use state vocational services and those who have are not satisfied with the services they received (the survey did not ask why this is so).
- Historically, many Native Americans do not go for higher education post-high school. The state pays only for transition services for Special Education students and not for those who need these services due to behavioral or emotional problems.
- For Native Americans in southern Rhode Island, transportation is a problem as the reservations are not on RIPTA bus lines. Taxis are expensive and not accessible for many with physical disabilities.
- For this same group, housing is a big problem. There is a high rate of homelessness. Employment is a problem as well.
- Lack of education is perhaps the greatest barrier to employment. A significant issue is that people in their 40’s or 50’s who have worked in blue collar jobs such as janitorial or CNA positions who become physically unable to do those jobs any more and thus have a major employment challenge.

The African-American Community

Key Findings

- In the state, 4.5% of the overall population is Black.
- Unemployment is a huge problem for African-Americans – anywhere in the US multiply by 6 times the average unemployment rate for black youth.
- Education is a major issue, especially for black males. 20-30% of African American teens fail to graduate from high school.
- Health disparities are great. Black male infants in the US have the highest possibility of dying in the first year of life. Black males are the only group in America whose life expectancy is declining.
- No matter the socioeconomic class, people from the
black community receive unequal health care from physicians. This racial disparity has been demonstrated in a number of studies.

- There is a lack of access to health care through uninsurance, underinsurance and insufficient providers.
- Exposure to substance abuse is high. In terms of African American young males, 13% are regular drug users (compared with 7% of white males); comparatively several times more black youths who are arrested are convicted when compared with white youth.
- Access to Vocational Rehabilitation services and the One Stops is limited due to the fact that it costs money to take the bus / get to the bus lines / pay for parking.

**The Immigrant Community (Genesis Center report)**

**Key Findings**

- Many new immigrants to Rhode Island are from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti and Cambodia. Language is a major barrier.
- The Genesis Center currently assists immigrants from 65 countries.
- There is an emphasis on Job Training and “English for Survival.” Employers participate in the Job Training classes; immigrants who attend these classes therefore have a contact in the field when the classes end.
- Access to health care is an issue for immigrants.
- Substance abuse is an issue and a barrier to job training.

A summary of these presentations will be written early in 2006 and reviewed by the Workgroup.

Background information for a Best Practices report on successful programs and initiatives around the nation regarding relationship-building, training, employment, and access to health care support services for individuals with disabilities in under-served communities was gathered. This report will be completed and distributed in 2006.

**Future of the Diversity Workgroup**

In 2006, the 2005 Diversity Workgroup Presentation Summary and Best Practices Report will be completed. At least one Workgroup meeting will be held in 2006 to review the 2005 environmental scan, identify a strategy to build relationships with traditionally under-served communities and utilize the findings of the workgroup to bridge gaps, and review Rhodes to Independence materials to ensure they are culturally sensitive. An additional agenda item may be to include a final presentation from a population that is not a minority group which was an emphasis of the Workgroup.
The goals of the Rhodes to Independence Housing Workgroup are to construct sustainable system changes that will remove barriers preventing people with disabilities from residing in the community or housing arrangement of their choice and improve capacity and access to affordable and accessible housing across the continuum.

The Housing Workgroup includes members representing state agencies, non-profit organizations, businesses, educators, consumers and a Congressional Representative. The Workgroup met six times throughout the year and established subcommittees to work on deliverables during the months that the full Workgroup did not meet.

Accomplishments
The Housing Workgroup’s 2005 accomplishments include the following.

Housing Focus Groups
The Housing Workgroup implemented the goal to conduct a qualitative study to reach a better understanding of housing-related issues for Rhode Islanders with disabilities. The objectives of this study included gathering information on housing barriers for Rhode Islanders with disabilities and gaining insight into recommendations to increase opportunities for people with disabilities to live in the community or housing arrangement of their choice.

The Housing Workgroup and staff member conducted this research which involved two focus groups. The sample included a total of twenty seven participants. The first focus group consisted of 12 participants who provide direction on issues relating to housing on the individual, community, organization, state and national levels. The second focus group included 15 individuals who either have a disability or are a family member of a person with a disability.

The key findings of the research included identifying the following barriers to housing for people with disabilities:
- State-wide housing system barriers
- Attitudinal barriers
- Limited affordable, available and accessible housing
- Limited support services
- Lack of consumer advocacy

The results of this research suggest a number of areas that have the potential to positively impact housing opportunities for people with disabilities. Based on the findings, recommendations for state-wide commitments to sustainable housing systems changes and strategies for removing barriers were developed.

Development of Accessibility Survey
The Housing Workgroup developed the Shelter Access Survey to determine the accessibility of emergency shelters in the state and explore how shelters are meeting the needs of people with disabilities.

In developing the survey instrument, the Housing Workgroup conducted a review of shelter accessibility research and used the ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) technical requirements as the basis for developing questions.

The survey was designed to gather information on the physical and programmatic accessibility of shelters including:
- Parking
- Exterior Routes
- Entrance
- Common Use Areas
- Interior Routes
- Doors
- Alarms and Notification Devices
- Sleeping Accommodations
- Restrooms
- Amenities
- Goods and Services
- Communications
The goal of the survey is to assist shelter administration and staff to better understand and address the needs of people with disabilities seeking emergency shelter. In early 2006, the Housing Workgroup will identify strategies for implementation and recommendations for creating strategic shelter accessibility plans.

Home Modifications Loan Program
The Workgroup’s findings of the Housing Focus group report demonstrated the critical need for increased home modifications options as a critical factor in providing Rhode Islanders with disabilities the choice to live independently in their communities.

Based on these findings, the Housing Workgroup has identified the goal of developing legislation for a Home Modifications Loan Program for individuals with disabilities and the elderly. This program will provide loans for home modifications to a homeowner who has a disability, or has a household member who has a disability or rents to an individual with a disability.

In 2005, the Workgroup completed the initial phase of this goal which involved writing an issue brief on the need for a Home Modifications Loan Program in Rhode Island. The development of the legislation for a Home Modifications Loan Program will begin in early 2006.

Community Involvement
The Housing Workgroup participated in housing educational programs throughout the year including presenting workshops at regional and state conferences.

Future of the Housing Workgroup
In 2006, the Housing Workgroup will hold quarterly meetings to focus on achievement of the following goals:

- Develop legislation for a Home Modifications Revolving Loan Program for individuals with disabilities and the elderly for improving accessibility and/or to live more independently in the community.
- Identify strategies for implementation of the Housing Focus Group recommendations.
- Identify strategies for implementation of the Shelter Access Survey.
- Research, plan and implement a central Rhode Island Accessible Housing Registry that includes public housing, privately operated subsidized housing, and private market-rate developments.
- Develop relevant presentations to be included as part of the Rhodes to Independence Speakers Bureau.
The goal of the Rhodes to Independence Transportation Workgroup is to develop and implement strategies to enhance existing transportation options and services in support of people with disabilities who are employed and those who would like to work, and to explore innovative programs that have been implemented elsewhere and might be duplicated in Rhode Island.

The Transportation Workgroup includes members representing state agencies, non-profit organizations, advocacy groups and consumers. The Workgroup met four times throughout the year.

Accomplishments
The Transportation Workgroup’s 2005 accomplishments include the following.

- Providing background to new Workgroup members on previous Transportation Workgroup accomplishments and reports.
- Discussion of available transportation services and options for people with disabilities.
- Identification of indirect and direct transportation costs and services in Rhode Island. Presentations were made by representatives of the Trudeau Center and the Office of Rehabilitation Services concerning internal and external transportation options and expenses. In addition, there was an overview and examination of a survey by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services that highlighted the difficulties in tracking actual transportation expenditures and service duplication resulting in goals and recommendations that included increasing the amount of planning and coordination between human service agencies and transit systems, maximizing the use of existing resources, expanding the availability of community transportation services and developing a tracking system to determine the department’s actual expenditures.
- A 2005 Workgroup emphasis was to examine best practices around the country in terms of private-public partnerships and non-profit programs that might be adapted in Rhode Island. A detailed overview of the Independent Transportation Network of America was provided to the Workgroup. This is a non-profit volunteer driver organization that started in Maine and received federal transportation funds at the outset but currently operates without state or federal funds. Although the program serves senior citizens and not people with disabilities, this model could be adapted and expanded. A similar program is functioning in Howard County, Maryland.
- A summary of the 2005 National Council on Disabilities Report and a more comprehensive Best Transportation Practices Report detailing programs around the country were to have been completed in 2005. Due to unexpected circumstances in the third and fourth quarters of the year, these reports will be completed in 2006.

Future of the Transportation Workgroup
At the October 20th meeting, the future of the Transportation Workgroup was discussed. While members appreciated receiving more information and reports, there was a sense that pragmatically there was little that could be accomplished in the context of Workgroup meetings. Though a January meeting was tentatively scheduled, the final products of the 2005 Workgroup (the summary and best practices report iterated above) when complete may constitute the final deliverables for the Workgroup as they are presented to the Steering Committee and distributed to Workgroup members and other relevant entities.
The goal of the Rhodes to Independence Youth in Transition Workgroup is to identify and remove gaps within the system to ensure youths with disabilities between the ages of 14 to 21, who are either graduating or leaving the school system, are aware of and receive the necessary transition services to obtain employment, while ensuring appropriate health care and supportive services.

The Youth in Transition Workgroup includes members representing state agencies, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, consumers and parents of youth in transition. The Workgroup met six times throughout the year and established subcommittees to work on deliverables during the months that the full Workgroup did not meet.

Accomplishments
The Youth in Transition Workgroup’s 2005 accomplishments include the following.

“Creating Pathways to Work” Train the Trainer Sessions Outcomes Data
In early 2005, the Youth in Transition Workgroup implemented the “Creating Pathways to Work Manual” Train the Trainer sessions. The training sessions were the final product from the 2003 Rhode Island Parent Information Network Vendor Request to support the development and distribution of this Training Manual. In 2004, the Youth in Transition Workgroup completed the Training Manual to assist students, families and professionals to make informed decisions concerning transition from secondary education to employment.

The training sessions incorporated content presentations, discussions, role plays, independent study and group activities on four training modules: Job Skills Training and Meaningful Employment; Social Security Administration Work Incentives; Higher Education; and Transportation. A total of twenty-two professionals attended the two five-hour training sessions which were facilitated by Youth in Transition Workgroup members. The training participants received a comprehensive Training Manual to be used as a training tool. It included trainer notes, overheads, handouts and a CD-ROM of the modules for use as a Power Point Presentation.

As a follow-up to the training, the Workgroup developed a survey to collect data on the training outcomes. The survey was sent to participants six months after the training to obtain data on the following: number of training sessions or presentations conducted; demographics of participants; and the module content utilized. The findings demonstrated on-going state-wide training opportunities for professionals, parents and students using the content from all four “Creating Pathways to Work” training modules.

Development of a Youth Interview Tool
The booklet “Career Road Map: How to Get a Job” was developed for youths with disabilities. This booklet provides information, resources and suggestions to assist young adults with disabilities to seek and obtain employment.

The completion of this goal involved conducting an in-depth review of research and materials on the issue of career development. The analysis of data resulted in the identification of key topic areas to be addressed in the booklet:
- Keys to Career Success
- Job Interests
- Job Search Strategies
- Writing a Great Resume
- Contacting Employers
- The Interview & Follow-up
- Knowing your Rights
Throughout the year, Workgroup members were actively involved in the development of the booklet including sharing relevant resources and experiences, conducting progress reviews, participating in discussions and providing feedback.

In early 2006, the Youth in Transition Workgroup will develop a strategy and provide outreach for the dissemination of “Career Road Map: How to Get a Job.”

Assistive Technology Strategic Transition Plan The Youth in Transition Workgroup expanded its membership this year to include professionals working in the area of assistive technology from state agencies and non-profit organizations, including the Assistive Technology Access Partnership (ATAP).

The Workgroup identified topics to be reviewed and discussed in greater detail through presentations by experts in the field. The topics included: Assistive Technology: Speaking from Experience; Transitioning Youth Needing/Using Assistive Technology; and Procedures for Assistive Technology Transition Planning.

The goal to develop an assistive technology strategic plan to inform transitional youths and their families about training and acquisition of assistive technology was addressed in the State Plan for Assistive Technology developed this year. In 2006, the Youth in Transition Workgroup will continue to collaborate with ATAP to provide outreach and information on assistive technology transition planning.

1619 (a) and 1619 (b) Work Supports: Issue paper and Power Point Presentation The research on 1619 (a) and 1619 (b) work supports continued with the goal of completion in early 2006. In addition, a Power Point presentation will be developed early next year to be incorporated into the Rhodes to Independence Speakers Bureau. It is anticipated that this presentation will raise awareness of available work and higher education incentives/supports and provide information on the eligibility determination processes.

Community Involvement The Youth in Transition Workgroup participated in several transition initiatives throughout the year including serving on the planning committee for the College Forum, participating in the Rhodes to Independence Speakers Bureau and presenting workshops at regional and state conferences. In addition, the Youth in Transition Workgroup represented Rhode Island as part of the State team attending the National Leadership Summit on Improving Results for Youth with Disabilities in Washington, DC.

Future of the Youth in Transition Workgroup In 2006, the Youth in Transition Workgroup will hold quarterly meetings to focus on achievement of the following goals:

- Develop a distribution plan and provide outreach for the dissemination of “Career Road Map: How to Get a Job” for young job seekers with disabilities.
- Review current state post-school/career outcomes data to identify strengths/weaknesses; level of quality; and potential opportunities for a more unified data sharing system.
- Develop recommendations to improve youth involvement in the transition process to employment including policy development, planning efforts and outreach activities.
- Collaborate with the State Transition Council on the priorities identified at National Leadership Summit on Improving Results for Youth with Disabilities.
- Develop relevant presentations to be included as part of the Rhodes to Independence Speakers Bureau.
The Rhodes to Independence Steering Committee wishes to express appreciation to Steve Kitchin, Chair of the Steering Committee, Project Director Elaina Goldstein, and to all of the individuals who served on the five Steering Committee Workgroups this year, and especially the Workgroup Chairs – Aleatha Dickerson, Anne LeClerc, Michelle Malloy, and Michael Spoerri. Without their generosity of time and expertise, this year’s Rhodes to Independence accomplishments and this 2005 Annual Report would not have been possible. The Steering Committee is grateful to the above-cited Chairs, Project Director Elaina Goldstein and staff members Kate McCarthy-Barnett, Valerie Shore and Nancy Wooten for providing their expertise and skill in staffing the Rhodes’ office, the Workgroups and drafting the Workgroup and related reports.

We wish to acknowledge and thank University of Rhode Island College of Pharmacy Dean and Professor Donald E. Letendre, and Professor Paul Larrat for their valuable support and advocacy for the Rhodes to Independence. In addition, we extend our gratitude to the very capable College of Pharmacy administrative staff that has helped us through innumerable accounting challenges, budget and grants issues.

The continued oversight in 2005 of the Rhode Island Medicaid Buy-In legislation’s progress implementation was made possible through the time and effort of a number of individuals. The Steering Committee acknowledges with gratitude their contribution, with a special thanks to Representative Eileen Naughton, Rhodes’ Project Director Elaina Goldstein, Steering Committee Chairman Steve Kitchin and Governor’s Commission for Disabilities Executive Secretary Bob Cooper.

The staff of the three technical assistance centers for the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant deserve commendation: (1) the Center for Workers with Disabilities at the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), (2) the National Consortium for Health Systems Development (NCHSD), and (3) the New England Partnerships (NEP) for their continuous help, support and responses to any and all questions, and for the opportunity to discuss challenges and accomplishments with our many “state partners”.

Last, but certainly not least, we would like to take this opportunity to thank the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for providing the funding and project support for this important project.
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