

# BUILDING BRIDGES FOR A LIFE LIKE ANY OTHER

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## THE COMMUNITY CONNECTORS AND BRIDGE BUILDERS PROJECT



Center For  
**Independent**  
Futures®

# Introductions

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- Ann Sickon  
*Executive Director, Center for Independent Futures*
- Cynthia Witherspoon  
*Evanston Community Connector*
- Valerie Barich  
*Frankfort Community Connector*
- Maria Castillo  
*Cicero/Berwyn/Little Village Community Connector*

# The Community Connectors and Bridge Builders Project

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- 3 geographic locations
  - Evanston
  - Frankfort
  - Cicero/Berwyn/Little Village
- Purpose: Provide intentional support to individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) to access mainstream community activities (municipal, civic, social, spiritual, cultural, etc.) that align with the individual's interests and desires.

# Program Materials

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- Develop volunteer recruitment plan and materials (brochures)
- Develop training for community volunteers to expand confidence in spending time with people with disabilities (Bridge Builder Training Materials)
- Develop recruitment plan to engage individuals with I/DD to participate in program
- Develop an Interest Inventory for individuals with I/DD
- Develop Implementation Guide and materials to support training and recruitment (video) for other communities wishing to implement this program

# Community Connector Role

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- Community Connector (CC) recruits and trains volunteers to be Bridge Builders to provide support to individuals with I/DD to access community activities.
- CC identifies interests of volunteers and specific community opportunities they participate in.
- CC recruits and identifies participants and provides support in completing the Interest Inventory to determine interests/passions and community opportunities the participant wants to access.

# Community Connector Role

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- CC identifies and matches volunteers and participants that share similar interests/passions.
- Where possible, matches are selected that allow for geographic proximity.
- CC documents the match.
- CC provides additional support to the Bridge Builders to identify solutions to existing barriers preventing an individual's participation in the community activity.

# Bridge Builder Role

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- Volunteers attend Bridge Builders training.
- CC introduces Bridge Builder and participant to each other. CC provides support as necessary and then fades.
- Bridge Builder introduces the participant to the community opportunity and to others who are part of the club/initiative/organization.
- Bridge Builder continues to meet with the participant and facilitates any additional supports needed to promote the participant's involvement in the desired opportunity.
- Bridge Builders help identify and engage "Gate Keepers" and may be a Gate Keeper themselves.

# Individual with I/DD Role

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- Participant completes an Interest Inventory and helps identify needed supports.
- Participant attends meetings with Bridge Builder to participate in the identified community opportunity.
- Participant communicates with CC and Bridge Builder.



# Bridge Builder Program Evaluation

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- Program evaluation was provided by the University of Illinois at Chicago, Institute on Disability and Human Development.
- Training participants completed a survey before and after the training.
- Informational interviews conducted with individuals with I/DD, their parents and Bridge Builders.

# Pre-Post Survey Results

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- Preliminary results are available from the Berwyn, Cicero, and Little Village pilot. 37 people completed the survey.
- Training participants were **highly satisfied** with the presenters' knowledge, the quality of the materials, and skills on building relationships with people with disabilities.
- Statistically significant increase in:
  - **Confidence** in spending time with people with developmental disabilities
  - Positive attitudes about the **rights** of people with developmental disabilities
  - Positive attitudes about the **competency and equality** of people with developmental disabilities

# Pre-Post Survey Results

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- What survey participants liked best about the trainings:
  - “The emphasis on doing things WITH, not FOR other people. The emphasis on others’ talents.”
  - “Thinking about how to really listen to dreams and aspirations of PWD and how to support them. Understanding how isolating it can be to be a person with disabilities.”
  - “Clear explanation and support of person-centered planning.”
  - “The way that the person gave the training, it was very clear, respectful, nice and tolerant. Very informative.”

# Impact in Participants' Lives

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## Evanston

- Jonathan's Film Connection: "Realizing a Dream"
- Alyssa's Advocacy Connection: "Connecting to Community Resources"
- Jonathon's Scouting Connection: "Speaking to a Boy Scout Troop"

# Impact in the Community

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## Evanston

- Trained 25 Bridge Builders
- Helped firefighters see the value of arranging the opportunity to be a part of the crew, including a ride-along
- Created opportunities to advocate and share stories
- Building capacity in Evanston to recruit more volunteers as a result of Bridge Builders sharing their stories

# Lessons Learned

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## Evanston

- Other associational entities were not necessarily the best source for providing volunteers.
- Personal Networks garnered support from individuals in the community who were willing to make a personal connection.

# Impact in Participants' Lives

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## Frankfort

- Matt's Cars Connection: "Finding Your Voice"
- Allison's Health Club Connection: "Finding Your Inner Strength"

# Impact in the Community

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## Frankfort

- Trained 5 Bridge Builders
- Connected with 6 organizations to open doors and eyes in the fields of law, education, religion, and recreation
- Evolving interaction in voice and space
- Creating opportunities to partner and expand



# Lessons Learned

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## Frankfort

- Frankfort has structural barriers: education, transportation, individual, engagement
- Frankfort has funding barriers
- Volunteers had a personal connection
- Frankfort needs to develop social capital and structural supports

# Impact in Participants' Lives

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## Berwyn, Cicero, and Little Village

- PAMELA is creating connections around childcare.
- ABIGAIL is starting a dating relationship and learning to limit bullies and to advocate for her peers.
- SAVIOR started school in August 2016 and began socializing with friends. He is beginning a dating relationship.
- CINDY started college in September 2016. She reports advocating more for herself and having more confidence.

# Impact in Participants' Lives

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## Berwyn, Cicero, and Little Village

- ANGEL is expressing himself more visually and through communication technology (cellular or tablet), is expressing his dreams to “sing,” and has asked his family to go to school or program.
- ALAN is exploring dreams and ideas for work and is advocating for more independence.

# Impact in the Community

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## Berwyn, Cicero, and Little Village

- Community members who were initially skeptical now state they recognize the benefits of the program. (Volunteering is a new concept.)
- We are collaborating with staff at La Villita Park in Little Village to determine ways individuals with I/DD can volunteer in the community.
- In September, there will be volunteer opportunities beginning at the Family Resource Center on Disabilities, and the local alderman and La Villita staff want to discuss future plans for our project.

# Impact in the Community

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## Berwyn, Cicero, and Little Village

- Community cultural taboos reinforce overprotection of people with disabilities and the tendency not to believe in their abilities. We have seen big changes in some of the participants' fathers, who have begun to participate and express repressed feelings of pain and frustration about having a child with disabilities.

# Lessons Learned

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## Berwyn, Cicero, and Little Village

- Volunteering is not common in our culture. If the work is not paid, then there's no sense in doing it.
- Agencies or places where we initially believed we would have maximum support for our project have been the biggest barriers. Agency staff stated they were concerned about conflict of interest in programs, although it was explained that the Bridge Builders Project is very different from other programs, with a new dynamic and goal.

# Lessons Learned

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## Berwyn, Cicero, and Little Village

- We only had Community Support Services collaboration in Cicero from January 2016 to May 18, 2016.
- In public places, like parks and the library, we were told that insurance policies require them to have an employee present to oversee participation in our project by individuals with disabilities for safety reasons. In some community spaces, payment was required for use of the space, or we were told that the space was not ever going to be available to us.

# Thank you!

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- Thank you to the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities for this investment in the Community Connectors and Bridge Builders Project.
- Final implementation guide and training materials, in both English and Spanish, will be available by the end of November 2016.