

COMMISSION ON DISABILITY  
ANNUAL REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL  
June 1983

Introduction

In 1981, the Handicapped Advisory Committee of the Human Relations Commission of Fort Collins desired, as a major goal, to increase active participation of the local handicapped population in the jurisdiction of the City. To reach this goal, the Committee had two objectives: 1) to change its status from a Committee to an independent Commission and 2) to be more instrumental in actions taken by the City as they relate to the handicapped population. Objective #1 was completed which created the Commission on Disability (COD). The following report is submitted as documentation and illustration of the efforts of this Commission as it began working on accomplishing the second objective.

Goals and Objectives

The beginning months of the Commission on Disability were devoted to constructing by-laws, to clarifying the goals and objectives etched out previously by the Handicapped Advisory Committee, and to becoming more educated on Section 504 regulations for the entire Commission membership.

The by-laws, approved in April 1982, state the purpose of the Commission which is to "advise the City Council and the employees and residents of the City of Fort Collins on issues concerning the handicapped." The Commission also has the responsibility to "formulate, recommend and support such programs as it deems important to assure voluntary compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and other related legislation." In order to fulfill its purpose, the Commission retained the primary goal previously established by the HAC and added two other goals. The goals for the Commission's first year were defined as:

1. To increase active participation of the local handicapped population in all areas under the jurisdiction of the City of Fort Collins.
2. To increase awareness.
3. To work closer with established boards and commissions on issues concerning the handicapped to further fulfill their needs.

Specific objectives were outlined for each stated goal. These were:

Goal #1 - Objective:

1. To draft a letter inviting representatives of other groups serving the handicapped to attend COD meetings so they could express their needs and concerns.

Goal #2 - Objectives:

1. Organized an Accessibility Research team.
2. NYDP (National Year of the Disabled Person) Resource Directory.
3. Annual Poster Contest for School Age Children
4. Develop a "Hire the Handicapped" brochure.
5. Annual Mayor's Award Breakfast and Awareness Day.
6. Notification with local media concerning monthly meetings.
7. Increased representation on other community boards and commissions.
8. Disseminate information on concerns of handicapped community.
9. Publish monthly newsletter.

Goal #3 - Objectives:

1. Contact other boards and commissions for copy of minutes.
2. COD members to become, or to recruit, liaison membership on pertinent boards and commissions.

In reviewing the activities of the Commission in the months after the formulation of these objectives, it is clear that the Commission's activities have been relatively successful. The following is a brief review of the activities orchestrated by the Commission as they relate to accomplishing the above stated goals and objectives.

GOAL #1

Information Exchange

Contact was made with various groups in the community. Representatives from the Disabled American Veterans and Diabetes Foundation were invited to attend meetings for an exchange of information. In addition, a local citizen interested in creating an accessible recreation area presented his plans to COD for feedback.

Input from the DAV gave the Commission awareness of problems encountered by disabled vets in the lack of enforcement of disabled veteran license plates by local police. Input by the Handicapped Information Office also pointed out the problems faced by temporarily disabled drivers or those visiting in the area. As a result of the information provided by these two organizations, the Commission helped to initiate a program with the City establishing temporary handicapped parking permits and improved enforcement of handicapped parking violations.

The Commission was also asked by the City to give: 1) input on identifying issues to help with strategy plan for budget; b) suggestions for improving accessibility within the City using \$6,000; c) suggestions for accessible parks; d) suggestions for signing of old and new city halls; and e) input on prioritization of curb improvements.

#### Architectural Barrier Removal

A major activity of the Commission has been the removal of architectural barriers. The Commission has been instrumental in awarding grants to individuals or non-profit organizations to assist in removing physical barriers to disabled citizens from monies allotted from the Community Development Block Grant.

The Commission approves or disapproves applications for the barrier removal projects and has allotted \$41,913.51 since 1982 for 11 projects. Pending projects come to another \$22,000. Barrier removal has included modification of private dwellings, exterior ramps and the purchase and installation of Ability Phones and telecommunication devices for the deaf (TTY's). The TTY's and Ability Phones were allocated monies separate from architectural barriers because they are considered to be needed for environmental rather than architectural access. Funds also were approved to assist the City's efforts to improve accessibility (i.e., for curb cuts and for signage at City Halls.)

#### City Services

Commission members have met with Transfort and Care-A-Van to examine specific aspects of transportation as it affects disabled individuals. A report, distributed to the City Council and appropriate city departments, gave the findings, evaluation and suggestions of the commission. A need for more accessible transportation was found upon examination. In addition, the Commission has also given feedback on a Building Board of Appeals hearing which directly affected the accessibility of a community office building.

Section 504

Another major activity orchestrated by Commission members has been the development of a 504 Campaign Committee. This committee is comprised of various concerned community members, who are interested in issues relating to both Section 504 and PL 94-142. These two laws have direct impact on disabled people and recent revisions proposed by the Federal Government would have seriously affected the rights protected under these laws. The activities of the 504 Campaign Committee were varied and ranged from meeting with political candidates to sending letters to Washington as this Committee attempted to inform as many individuals as possible. The Committee met with both those who were incumbants and those who were running for office prior to election time in order to inform them of the concern over these laws. Letters and petitions were signed and sent to protect the revisions. Numerous letters to the editor were transmitted as well as radio interviews given to help inform the public. Members of the Commission continued to update themselves as well to the full meaning of 504 legislation by attending various workshops relating to 504 issues.

GOAL #2

Community Awareness

The Commission has put a lot of its energies into increasing the awareness of this community of the issues facing disabled individuals. Much has been done to promote positive images of disabled persons as well as to educate and inform the entire community of general information concering disabilities and disabled persons.

One major and continuing activity sponsored by the Commission is the Annual Mayor's Awards Breakfast. This past year, the event was held in conjunction with the National Employment of the Handicapped Week. The Awards Breakfast was designed to promote positive efforts in the community that contribute to a better quality of living for disabled residents. The Commission established guidelines for the award nominations which were solicited in newspaper announcements.

The Awards Breakfast presented a panel discussion on employment of the handicapped and presented the certificates of recognition to the winners. Prominent community members were invited as guests. A brochure (created by COD) highlighting the employment of five disabled community members was distributed to promote the employment of the handicapped, and is now available in the Handicapped Information Office.

As part of the Awards Braakfast, the Commission solicited original poster drawings from grade schools. The student artists were recognized for their efforts at the Breakfast and their work was displayed for the guests.

The other aspect of the Awards Breakfast consisted of an Awareness Day. Various community members were asked to simulate a disability as they proceeded through their normal day. Each person simulating a disability was paired with a person having that type of disability. The effects of this activity were evident in the subsequent reactions by the simulators. A broadcast of their reactions was seen over the local cable network and personal articles were printed in the local newspapers.

### Information

The Commission has maintained a strong commitment to, and has undertaken many activities that relate to, sharing information. Continuing a project started as part of the International Year of the Disabled Person, the Commission began to compile a list of resources serving the disabled population. This Resource Directory would be available to all agencies listed and be distributed through the Handicapped Information Office for individual users. The Directory has not yet been printed due to budgetary problems but it is slated for distribution this summer.

A newsletter containing information concerning the disabled population is now distributed by the Handicapped Information Office. The newsletter is supported by the COD and, although it also faced financial problems, it is presently being sent to both disabled individuals and interested agencies in the community.

The Commission has also consulted with the Crisis Intervention Center and Poudre Valley Hospital. The CIC requested assistance in evaluating the accessibility of the agencies listed by them. The hospital requested an inservice training program for its staff on Section 504 Regulations.

An accessibility Research Team was created in conjunction with the Handicapped Information Office to help answer accessibility questions such as those posed by the CIC. The team is available to research a particular building to determine its accessibility level and this service is now available to community organizations.

Many COD meetings include programs meant to increase the awareness of the Commission members themselves. For example, a program on employment of the handicapped in transportation services was presented by Marj Walsh. As the Commission becomes a more knowledgeable resource, so too does it become a better quality resource.

GOAL #3

Communication

The Commission has made it a point to be in contact with other boards, commissions or groups that may directly affect the disabled population through policies, practices, or services. Liaison relationships have been formed with many groups and these liaisons fulfill the need to have the disabled population represented as well as the Commission's need to be informed of other activities.

Commission members attend the meetings of such diverse groups as the Mountain Bell Consumer group, the Library Services Board, the Community Action Board, the Community Development Block Grant Steering Committee, and the Uniform Building Code Committee. Liaisons from the Senior Citizens' Board and the Disabled American Veterans have also been established. Groups such as the Loveland Handicapped Advisory Committee and the Senior Citizens Board routinely send copies of minutes to keep the Commission up-to-date.

Since many of the Commission members belong to other agencies, organizations, or groups, the entire community networking efforts of the Commission are far reaching. COD members feel committed to establishing connections with local, state, and national organizations that promote the betterment of the quality of life for disabled individuals in order to be of benefit to the Fort Collins community.

NYDP (National Year of the Disabled Person)

The Commission has continued its liaison with the National Office on Disability and this year applied for a grant award offered by the NOD. The awards were offered as a means of recognizing communities for outstanding contributions towards enhancing the quality of life for disabled persons. Although the Commission did not receive an award, applying for it was a means of promoting the existence and activities of the Commission to others as well as a means to stay involved with national activities.

PROBLEMS

A major stumbling block was encountered when the Commission's original city staff liaison resigned. Appointment of another City liaison was uncertain for a time. Once it was settled, the question of funding the COD's activities was raised. The Commission was assigned to the Community Development Office which was unable to financially support the Commission's activities. The uncertainty of funding caused delays for specific projects

such as the Resource Directory and newsletter. At one point the Commission was informed to generate its own funds. Eventually, though, it was decided that funds from the Architectural Barrier Removal Program Block Grant monies would be used for the Commission's operating expenses. Although these monies are City authorized, the Block Grant Program is technically from the Federal Government, therefore giving the Commission the status of a City advisory group supported by federal funds.

#### FUTURE PLANS

The Commission redefined its goals and objectives in January of 1983 after a careful examination of the Commission's activities, and in May 1983, the Commission also outlined tasks to accomplish these goals and objectives. This redefinition has helped to better clarify the Commission's future activities. The newly established goals, objectives, and tasks for the Commission on Disability are attached to this report.