

Mayor's Council on Disability  
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Meeting Minutes  
February 04, 2008

Sandra Booher, Chairperson  
Bea Lyons, Vice Chair  
Katie Jones, Secretary  
Jill Hindman, Parliamentarian

Council Members:

Dr. Rick Rader  
Jim Queen  
Mary Ann Schenk  
Tommy Gates  
Gina Turley  
Carolyn Boyd  
Carol Martin  
Phillip Stevens  
Karl Epperson

Meeting called to order by Chairperson, Sandy Booher

In attendance:

Sandy Booher  
Bea Lyons  
Jill Hindman  
Jim Queen  
Gina Turley  
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Tommy Gates

Excused absence:

Katie Jones  
Dr. Rick Rader  
Carolyn Boyd  
Phillip Stevens

Matt Lea, Special Assistant to the Mayor, City of Chattanooga

Jacqueline Strong-Moss, Director, Office of Multicultural Affairs, City of Chattanooga

Chairperson Booher began the meeting with the presentation on shelters in Chattanooga that are not accessible for people with disabilities given by Brother Ron Fender from the Order of St. Gregory, who is the case manager for the Community Kitchen working with homeless people, and Gina Turley from The AIM Center who works with housing and homeless people. They discussed shelters that are not accessible and the needs of the homeless population who have disabilities.

Brother Fender shared the fact that when a person becomes homeless and goes on the street, s/he loses their citizenship and many of the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship. In discussing people with disabilities who become homeless, it is important to note that Chattanooga has no shelters for homeless people; there are missions and only one legitimate shelter for women and children in domestic violence situations. Shelters such as the Union Gospel Mission, the Chattanooga Rescue Mission and rarely the Salvation Army have religious agendas and are not bound by the ADA law or any federal mandate. Missions are not required to be accessible for those with a disability. Shelter care for people with disabilities is non-existent. The facilities currently serving homeless persons have barriers and obstacles to people with disabilities. Brother Fender also stated that they see people who are not ambulatory, people who have mental health issues, and people who are developmentally disabled every day. Case managers are not

prepared or trained to work with these people. There is great need to educate service providers about the needs of persons with various disabilities due to the fact that there is a growing population of people with physical and mental disabilities on the streets with no place to go. It is time to step up to the plate and address these issues. Until we change our way of thinking about homeless people, no one will move forward. Brother Fender shared individual stories to illustrate the great need that exists and to provide insight into homelessness.

Gina Turley is able to work through the disability part of the homeless person's profile and to understand the humanity of that person to find ways to help that human being. Most of her clients are mentally ill along with other disabilities such as diabetes. She collaborates with the Community Kitchen, Homeless Health Care Kitchen and Project Access to provide supportive services and housing. She stated that the problem with Chattanooga is that for a person with a disability who cannot get into a shelter, housing still takes a long time to access. The gap that exists now between where a person comes from whether it be incarceration, Moccasin Bend or the bus station, to move to housing is very scary and very dangerous in Chattanooga. People who were formerly middle class citizens now living in their cars/vans because they don't want to stay in a mission, one might think that they are choosing to be homeless. The fact is that they are not able to work because they have a disability and have been denied disability benefits; so, they have no income and are parking their cars wherever they can and eating at the Community Kitchen. Gina reminded us that there are 4.5 million homeless Americans; we tend to stereotype homeless people. The average age of a

homeless American is nine years old; the average age of homeless person in Chattanooga is 14 years old. Typical homeless person in New York City is a 6 year old girl. The general public still believes that the typical homeless person is an African American woman with children or an older alcoholic male; those stereotypes are no longer true. Some young adults may be thrown away by their families or they may be discharged from foster care without life skills.

Brother Fender and Gina responded to the question of what are some of the directions to be taken to find solutions for our homeless situations here in Chattanooga: building community, taking and restoring old buildings to develop housing, permanent supportive housing for homeless people within a community. If we could develop community and develop intentional community where homeless people can come together and live in communal situations to give one another support, that supportive permanent housing is the real answer. Let's take these old crumbling structures and create community for people who are now living under bridges. Recently it was announced that the Community Kitchen will open a wheelchair accessible 10-bed respite care facility in October, 2008. Agencies must collaborate to provide varied services needed by homeless people with disabilities.

Jacqueline Strong-Moss introduced Solomon Hatch, newly appointed Community Outreach Specialist with the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Ms. Strong-Moss is leaving her position of director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs to work with Human Rights and human Relations in Tacoma, Washington. She stated that a compliance officer will come on board soon who will work in the technical issues of ADA, with reasonable

accommodations, and with the discrimination hotline. She also emphasized that the Mayor's Council on Disability gains its credibility because its members are the "go-to group" for disability issues in the City of Chattanooga. Due to the MCD support, the SETHRA proposal was successfully approved by the City Council. Citizens may continue to request reasonable accommodations through the Office of Multicultural Affairs; Nicole Gwen is the contact person.

Completing the Mayor's Council on Disability retreat report is a priority; Chairperson Booher will set a date and time for MCD members to meet for the purpose of finalizing the retreat report. This report will provide a plan of action the next year.

Jim Queen reported on the CARTA progress on the voice selected for the on-board enunciation system for the fixed route buses. A male voice with southern accent has been chosen; the person is an announcer for NASCAR. Implementation for the on-board enunciation system will hopefully take place fall 2008. CARTA will have automated voice announcements for stops along with buildings of major importance located in the areas.

Bea Lyons reported that the MCD web site has received four contacts since the January meeting, mostly informational items such as the City's sporting events. Phillip Stevens has begun adding important events to the web site.

A reminder was given about Disability Days on the Hill to be held Wednesday, March 12, 2008, in Nashville. The Council would like to get persons from the Chattanooga area to attend; in past years there hasn't been much representation

from Chattanooga. Jill Hindman reported that there is now one accessible restroom in the Capital Building and one in the War Memorial Building.

Jill had no report for the Stigma Project, but rather she discussed Developmental Disabilities Council issues. She is working with the Legislature to pass "Fulfilling the Promise" proposal; this proposal will set aside new funding for folks with physical disabilities to receive services. Support is needed for House Bill 2569 sponsored by Representative Curtiss and for Senate Bill 2651 sponsored by Senator Tracy. Also the TennCare System has \$600 million in reserve money that is being held in a rainy day fund; it's not currently available for persons with disabilities.

Sandra Booher attended the Brain Injury luncheon recently and learned that there will be a Chattanooga Brain Injury Association Conference on March 06, 2008, to be held jointly at the Clarion Hotel and the Epilepsy Foundation.

Near close of the meeting, roll call was requested from the chairperson. Kim Prince is the new navigator with The Career Center, the position formerly held by Gary Thornton.

Beth Coleman reported that among soldiers returning from Afghanistan and Iraq, at least 40% (some researchers say 60%) of them have sustained traumatic brain injury whether concussive, invasive or combination of the two and will develop epilepsy. She asked for support for the Veterans Administration's creation of comprehensive epilepsy treatment centers.

Meeting minutes for January 07, 2008, were approved with corrections.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:10pm. Next meeting of the Mayor's Council on Disability will be held Monday, March 03, 2008.

Respectfully submitted by Bea Lyons, Vice Chair