

## **Addressing the Housing Needs of Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

### **Issue**

As individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities grow into adulthood, they and their families face many challenges. A significant concern continues to be obtaining the housing and supports necessary to live independently in the community. As the developmental disabilities service system moves toward self-direction, the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) is actively encouraging people to obtain their own housing in the community, while DDD provides the individual a budget for the supports and services needed to live independently. In addition to the fact that funding for supports and services is limited to annual budget appropriations, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are left to navigate the housing and rental market just like everyone else, but with far fewer resources.

According to the United States Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, the labor force participation of individuals with disabilities in February 2012 was under 20%, while for people without disabilities it was almost 70%. Most individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities rely on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to cover their living expenses, including housing. In 2010, over 4 million Americans with disabilities relied on federal monthly SSI incomes of less than \$8,500 per year – low enough to be priced out of every rental housing market in the nation. The average rent for a one-bedroom apartment was \$785 per month – far higher than the maximum monthly SSI payment of \$703 for people living independently.<sup>1</sup> This leaves most people with intellectual and developmental disabilities reliant on subsidized, affordable housing in order to live independently in the community.

### **Concern**

While The Arc of New Jersey consistently advocates for funding for supports and services through DDD to help people live independently in the community, there still remains an extreme shortage of available affordable housing to which individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities have access. The Administration has recognized this problem and the Departments of Community Affairs (DCA) and Human Services (DHS) have recently begun a new special needs housing initiative aimed at creating affordable, supportive housing for 600 individuals with developmental disabilities by June 2013. This is a great start to addressing the need for affordable housing, but there is still a very long way to go.

### **Recommendations**

In order to address the critical shortage of affordable housing for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, The Arc of New Jersey recommends the following:

#### **1. Renew and replenish the Special Needs Housing Trust Fund**

Since 2005, when the Special Needs Housing Trust Fund was signed into law and a \$200 million bond issue was authorized to create housing for people with special needs, the program has helped create quality, affordable housing with needed supportive services for over 2,000 families

and individuals with special needs throughout New Jersey. The Arc of New Jersey is extremely supportive of every effort to reinvest in the Special Needs Housing Trust Fund.

**2. Support the Residential Foreclosure Transformation Act (A2168/S1566)**

This legislation would establish a central agency under New Jersey's Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (HMFA) to purchase foreclosed properties to be used as affordable housing. This proposal would not only provide access to a whole new supply of homes to be used for affordable housing, but would also allow for more flexibility in funding such projects. Additionally, "foreclosure-impacted" municipalities could adopt a resolution to transfer municipal affordable housing trust fund monies into a "Foreclosure to Affordable Housing Transformation Fund" to be used over a period of two years to turn over 100,000 foreclosed properties into affordable housing. This bill provides incentives for municipalities to transition foreclosed properties to affordable housing, giving them a 2-to-1 match against their affordable housing obligation for units created from foreclosed properties using funds from municipal affordable housing trusts.

**3. Support ACR113**

This proposed constitutional amendment would provide that when the Legislature appropriates State revenues derived from betting on sports and athletic events, it would give first priority to providing funding for residential placements for individuals with developmental disabilities. The Arc of New Jersey is excited about the possibility of new revenues coming into the State and we hope that these funds can be used to tackle the need for affordable housing and the supports and services necessary for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live independently in the community. This legislation offers an innovative method to work towards resolving the critical housing problem in the developmental disabilities system.

**4. Allow municipalities to retain their trust fund monies (Support A2717)**

This bill would extend the amount of time that municipalities have to utilize the monies deposited in their municipal trust funds. The Arc of New Jersey feels strongly that individual municipalities are best equipped to address the affordable housing crisis for people with disabilities because they know their constituents and are intimately aware of the unique affordable housing needs of their communities. Additionally, many municipalities had their money set aside specifically for individuals with disabilities and are actively involved in a variety of projects that will help address the affordable housing needs of their constituents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. **If the municipal trust fund money does revert back to the State, it is imperative that those funds be dedicated specifically to housing for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.**

The Arc of New Jersey is encouraged that proposals have been introduced by both legislators and affordable housing advocates to attempt to resolve this critical issue. While each recommendation addresses part of the problem, it will take more than just one idea to solve this crisis. The affordable housing shortage is so widespread and complex that it will necessitate a comprehensive approach incorporating all of these initiatives to adequately meet the needs of New Jersey's most vulnerable populations. It is our hope that through continued collaboration between all interested stakeholders and enactment of a variety of affordable housing proposals, we will create an environment in New Jersey that not only alleviates the current affordable housing crisis for people with developmental disabilities, but also puts a sustainable system in place that is capable of meeting the affordable housing needs of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> O'Hara, Cooper and Zovistoski. *Priced Out in 2010: The Housing Crisis for People with Disabilities*. Technical Assistance Collaborative, Inc. Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, Housing Task Force. Funded by the Melville Charitable Trust.