

Advocates for Livability Across the Lifespan: Research Results from a Six-Community Training Project

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

INDIANA INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY AND COMMUNITY

Jennie Todd, Research Associate

Age-friendly community advocacy is evolving toward a lifespan perspective. Yet, there are few examples of how to effectively engage residents engaged in the planning conversations. The Advocates for Livable Communities (ALC) project was an intensive, five-day training program for older adults and persons with disabilities. who bring new voices and perspectives to livability conversations.

Overview

ALC started as a way to help local communities identify and engage new advocates and develop a visible advocacy group within their community. The group was charged with becoming knowledgeable and had a dedicated voice on livability issues to improve the lives of others in the community.

The Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities awarded the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community and its



partner, University of Indianapolis, partial funding to develop the curriculum and provide five days of training in advocacy for livability to conjoined groups of seniors and persons with disabilities. These groups, not normally part of local

planning and decision making, were trained with the goal of helping them take a seat at various planning tables.

Noteworthy is the success of the coming together of these two groups and participants seeing and talking about their community through an inclusive perspective, a community perspective, as opposed to aging and/or disability. A favorite comment came from John, an 80-year-old retired councilman, who said he had never actually met nor talked to a person with a disability and was



ashamed of all the potential resources he had overlooked during his tenure. Many long-held myths were dispelled by working together on this project.

Training

The focus throughout the training series is "livable for everyone" - advocating from a community lens, rather than a singular perspective, such as aging or disability.



The first half of the training focused on the concepts and language of livability.

Mobility - The ability to move easily, safely and conveniently in a community (walking/biking/rolling)

Housing - Affordable and accessible houses - home modification, visitability concepts

Social/Culture - Access to opportunities for social activitiesarts, culture, and enrichment

Health - health promotion, access to healthy activities, healthy foods and healthcare services

Recreation - Access to parks and recreational opportunities Education - Opportunities to learn, develop new skills,

The second half of the training focused on developing and enhancing advocacy skills.

Advocate - What it means to be an advocate and why it is important

Educate - How to educate

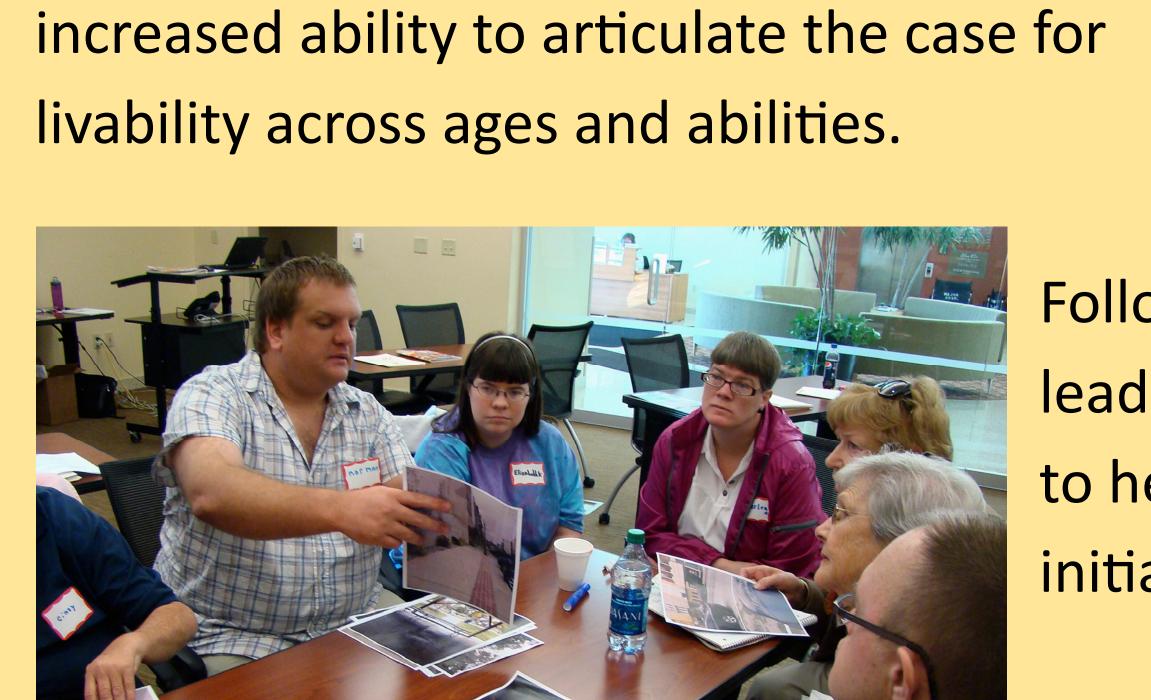
others, how to frame conversation and get your message out Unite - The different types of collaboration and how to build it Speak out - Effective letter writing, creating effective testimony, and using media

Engage - Review zoning and planning tools as well as city Master Plans

Serve - Why serve and characteristics of a good committee







Outcomes

Results from more than 100 trainees in six

communities indicate significant increases

in knowledge of "livable for a lifetime"

concepts and practices, increased

confidence in advocacy skills, and

Follow-up interviews with community leaders revealed they have used trainees to help them implement livability initiatives and conversations.

Our results indicate that this unique approach to broadening the base of advocates, enhancing their knowledge

and skills, and linking them to important community leaders is an effective means to encourage lifespan community planning.

Some specific examples include:

- Award of an Indiana Stellar Community recognition
- Establishing a mayor's council on livability
- Walk/Bike school campaign
- Healthy Shelby County Coalition
- New curb cuts and cross walks painted
- Hosted Active Living Workshops
- Representation on bike/pedestrian committee
- Representation on redevelopment committees
- Trained medical staff to accommodate visually impaired/blind patients
- ALC trainee invited to design group to share perspective on projects
- Purchasing wheelchair accessible tables for local plaza
- Surveyed polling sites for accessibility





On the last workshop afternoon, community leaders were invited to have a conversation with the new advocates. This turned out to be one of the most powerful components of the training. We asked 2 questions:

- To the leaders How can we (advocates) best work with local leaders? And how can we push forward the livability agenda?
- To the Advocates How can local leaders include advocates, going forward, in planning on issues and projects around livability?

