

Community Research for Assistive Technology



→ *Improving Access Through Collaboration* ←

A NIDRR funded project, H133A00702

PROJECT ABSTRACT

The California Foundation of Independent Living Centers, in collaboration with the California State University at Northridge, is conducting a five-year research program funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. In the third year, the Community Research for Assistive Technology (CR4AT) is continuing to increase the capacity of the independent living community in collecting research data about Assistive Technology (AT). The long-term goal is to use this research to improve the lives of people with disabilities in areas such as employment, health, function and independent living. Next year, we will take specific topics identified in the research and work on AT change projects with various stakeholders including the funders and AT vendors.

Community advocates for AT and systems change have been trained in research methods. In year two they conducted focus groups and in year three they are doing surveys. The next stage of action research includes reporting on the results to date and

recommending action. Staff from Independent Living Centers and the CFILC are learning how to apply research methods to various populations and in a range of topics. In addition, students at universities are also given the opportunity to intern with the project and gain important skills.

In Year 3 the project conducted a statewide survey that was completed on line, in person, over the phone or through alternative means. Participating ILC researchers administered the survey to consumers all across the State. Additionally we will construct a second survey geared to learning more about the Internet and computer technology being used by people with disabilities. During the fourth year, community and university researchers will be planning actions to address specific areas identified through the research. The goal in year four is to bring people together in AT partnerships to address the difficulties in assessing, funding and using AT. Training will be provided on research utilization and action planning. By year five participants will receive additional

Project Abstract Continued

training on reporting and dissemination of research.

CFILC is using an ecological approach to community research and technology. The ecological approach researches issues at individual, service and environmental levels as they impact all AT stakeholders, including the disabled. The four areas identified as priorities include employment outcomes, health and function issues, technology for access and function; and Independent living and Community Integration. In addition to these four issues we have already added funding and issues facing minorities as additional priorities.

CFILC is using a participatory action research model to develop cumulative research data about and around the use of and access to AT for people with disabilities. Participatory action research engages the people in the community to actively participate with the research from initial design to final presentation of results. The grant includes capacity building for research and training, and steps to ensure knowledge dissemination and utilization. Each step includes objectives at both the individual and system levels. Skills gained will result in professional development for those learning research skills and will allow for increased capability of data collection and dissemination of AT resources to effectuate an impact on AT public policy.

Two publications have been produced to disseminate the research from years one and two. Is it working? is a review of barriers

and successes in all six topic areas and How it works is the result of focus group research with consumers all across California. We also have a website that includes all our publications and materials as well as current surveys.

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660 J Street, Suite 270
Sacramento, CA 95814
(Voice) 916-325-1690
(TDD) 916-325-1695
(Fax) 916-325-1699
<http://atnet.org/CR4AT/cr4at.home.html>

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California Foundation for Independent Living Centers, Inc.
660 J Street, Suite 270
Sacramento, CA 95814
916-325-1690 9 (v)
916-325-1695 (tty)
916-325-1690 (fax)
www.cfilc.org