

# Human Services Agency ~~Receives~~ Grant Money Gives

Revolutionary Common Sense from  
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Human services agencies across the United States receive government funds to provide services for people with disabilities. Many of these agencies also aggressively pursue additional funds in the forms of grants; some are more successful than other. None of this is news. *But this is (get ready):* the Lakes Region Community Services Council (LRCSC) in Laconia, NH is *giving* grant money! Why? To create more inclusive communities!



Proposed projects are intended to ‘create a sense of community through building relationships and making a difference’ for all citizens involved.

“The goals are clear to those who apply. We want to enhance and build upon the hopes of individuals and groups who dream of being included in their community. We want to give individuals the opportunity to participate together in inclusive settings and offer the opportunity for all citizens to recreate together. We want to provide creative solutions with financial assistance to solve barriers and build on existing programs, in hopes of strengthening programs and projects by promoting diversity. We want to bring together people with a common interest or goal who may not otherwise have the opportunity to meet.”

The following is from the LRCSC January-February 2004 *Family Update* newsletter. Kim Labbe, Recreation Coordinator (and parent) writes, “The concept of mini-grants has been used throughout the United States for a variety of reasons, such as neighborhood revitalization in urban areas. Taking this idea and using it within an agency such as LRCSC is a unique twist on a successful concept.

“The mini-grant programs . . . are based/founded on the principle that communities are strengthened by all members sharing their gifts toward common dreams and goals. These grants are designed to encourage community members to use their personal interests and creativity to do something fun and beneficial in their community and involve new people in the activity.

Two mini-grants were described in Kim’s article. One grant was awarded to the Plymouth Park and Recreation department. Plymouth’s Program Coordinator Lisa Fahey-Ash used the funds to create a visual (picture-based) schedule of programs, as described in the newsletter article: “Too often, Lisa has observed children with disabilities sign up for [Park and Rec day camp] programs, then become anxious, which

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often resulted in meltdowns because they have difficulty with transitions. Often, families would simply quit. This inspired Lisa's idea for the visual schedules. However, Lisa mailed the schedules to *all* children. The surprise came when all parents commented on how useful the visual schedule was." Lisa, who is also connected with the NH Park and Rec Department and the New England Park and Rec Department, plans to share her innovative visual schedule idea statewide, to encourage all Park and Rec Departments to create their own visual schedules.

The second mini-grant was awarded to the Laconia Area Community Land Trust, to complete the beautification of a community park that includes an apartment building on the property. Kim writes, "Two individuals with disabilities reside in this apartment building. [The Trust] will involve the individuals, along with other community members, volunteers, and residents . . . in the project. The residents will assist in choosing and ordering the plants from the nursery, by making phone calls, and picking up the plants. These individuals will work alongside other volunteers to create the bed, plant, and mulch the shrubbery. The goal is to build community and citizenship with [The Trust] and to provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities to

be seen as contributors and valued members of their community."

Collectively, human service agencies spend millions of dollars each year, much of it focused on "fixing" or "helping" individual people with their "problems." Unfortunately, that way of doing business puts the locus of the "problem" within a person who has a disability. As a result, very little progress has been made toward inclusion—ensuring individuals with disabilities are valued, participating members of their communities. As I've written and spoken about extensively, the real locus of

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the problem is societal attitudes, which leads to the marginalization, devaluation, and exclusion of people with disabilities. LRCSC's actions are squarely addressing this issue: its community mini-grants focus on improving our communities (and societal attitudes) and promoting inclusion, instead of trying to change individuals with disabilities. And as Lisa found with her visual schedules, what's helpful for people with disabilities is usually beneficial for those without disabilities, as well!

I'm thrilled with LRCSC's vision and dedication, and I hope others will be inspired to move in a similar direction!