

HISTORY

CCARC - More than 55 years of Making Dreams Happen.

In 2004, after being incorporated for fifty-two years, Central Connecticut Association for Retarded Citizens (CCARC) opened the doors of its newly-constructed Education and Training Center on Slater Road in New Britain. This significant event was due to many supporters especially The American Savings Foundation, and the determination of untold numbers of parents, advocates and friends who worked diligently over the years to bring greater acceptance of and services to people with mental retardation and other disabilities.



THE 1950s

The profound impact of the efforts of these supporters had its roots in humble beginnings. In 1952, a small group organized to further the cause of providing more help for children with mental retardation. Their first board meeting was held in the home of one of its members, and Richard Hess was named the first president.

Following this, many "firsts" took place during this decade. A public school program for children with mental retardation began at New Britain's Smalley School. The Superintendent of New Britain Schools announced that in the upcoming year a curriculum appropriate for children with mental retardation would be developed and implemented. CCARC published its first telephone number in the area directory, and then drafted its first newsletter. The Kiwanis Club began sponsoring a summer recreation program for children with mental retardation at the Chamberlain School. To help educate the general public, CCARC donated one thousand dollars worth of books about developmental disabilities to the school libraries in New Britain, Berlin and Bristol, and to the library at the New Britain Teachers College (now Central Connecticut State University).

CCARC began facilitating a daycare service at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in New Britain for young children who could not participate in the regular school curriculum. The Berlin Public School system added its first class for children with mental retardation.

Then in the late 1950s the movement got a real boost. The comic actress and singer Martha Raye was featured in a nationally-broadcast Telethon with proceeds benefiting children with mental retardation in New York, Connecticut and New Jersey. Ida Martinelli, then president of the CCARC board of directors, served as the local chairperson. A short time later the Berlin Board of Education bought a vehicle to transport children with mental retardation to CCARC programs. Slowly, parents and other advocates of those with mental retardation gained ground. Each of the steps taken helped to create awareness about the issue of providing appropriate educational and services to those with intellectual disabilities.

THE 1960s

The 1960s also saw a lot of firsts. CCARC hired its first formal instructor, Russell Walsh, for its first-ever class for adults with mental retardation. Classes were held at New Britain Memorial Hospital until 1963, when they were moved to Klingberg Children's Home.

Hilda Pacinda, the parent of two children with mental retardation, started a Girl Scout troop that included girls with mental retardation. CCARC purchased its first vehicle, a 25-passenger van, with the help of Irene Sherwill who had saved \$2,000 worth of S&H Green Stamps and persuaded the stamp company to contribute another thousand dollars toward the purchase. Boys with mental retardation joined with non-disabled peers in a Boy Scout Troop at Lincoln School in New Britain. The agency moved from Percival School in Kensington to Our Lady of

Rosehill Home in New Britain. With assistance from staff of the Meriden Regional Center, services were provided for more than 30 pre-school children with mental retardation.

THE 1970s

In 1970, CCARC took a big step when it relocated its child care and adult training programs under one roof at Franklin Square in New Britain. At that time, the local United Way organized a golf tournament with proceeds benefiting CCARC. This tournament, now coordinated by CCARC, is still a major fundraiser for the agency. To complement its Annual Meeting, CCARC held a dinner—a potluck supper—in 1973. The Food Service Training program was operating at the New Britain Senior Center and was the impetus for training—teaching adults with mental retardation to cook and serve meals, manage money, and how to behave in a social setting—that is still effective today. Then, in 1974, a milestone for citizens who are mentally retarded occurred when the U.S. Post Office issued a stamp—“Retarded Children Can Be Helped” and raised awareness of the issue to a national level.

Throughout the 1970s steps continued to be taken to secure the future of CCARC. The agency hired its first executive director, Roger Nelson, who began exploring the possibility of people with mental retardation living independently in the community. Three apartments for five men, supervised by a CCARC staff person, were rented in downtown New Britain.

CCARC expanded its services to include making handcrafted materials to sell, planting marigolds for special education classes in public schools, offering behavior management programs for public schools elementary children, and conducting adult field trips utilizing a satellite program with Constructive Workshop (now CW Resources), a New Britain-based vocational rehabilitation agency.

News stories also helped draw attention to the abilities of people with mental retardation. Two local students, Joanne Heckman and George Johnson from the Temple School in New Britain, were among the winners in the International Special Olympics held in Michigan where approximately 3,200 athletes competed.

In 1977, CCARC proudly celebrated its 25th Anniversary as an association dedicated to providing education for children with mental retardation in public schools. That year CCARC also received its first check—\$2,000—from the Knights of Columbus Tootsie Roll drive, now an ongoing fundraiser to support those with mental retardation.



THE 1980s

In 1980, steps gave way to strides when a number of significant events occurred to advance the cause and build relationships. After five years of negotiations, an elevator was installed in the Old Courthouse building on Franklin Square in New Britain making it handicap accessible. These offices became the home of the New Britain Commission for the Handicapped. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare also approved construction of a group home for people with mental retardation to be built on Rocky Hill Avenue in New Britain. This federal land grant to CCARC was the first of its kind in the nation. (That land will officially transfer in 2010.) That year Central Connecticut Association for Retarded Children became Central Connecticut Association for Retarded Citizens.

In March 1982, groundbreaking took place for the Rocky Hill Avenue residence. CCARC further developed its services to include an after-school program. In 1983, James McCann was appointed Executive Director, and a second group home—the Bess McIntosh residence—opened. The home was named in honor of the late wife of Dr. John McIntosh, a strong CCARC advocate and Director Emeritus.

In 1983 CCARC Day Services was reorganized into two sections: Functional Activities and Vocational Services. Functional activities included educational training in arts and crafts, academics, bench work, community skills, cooking, domestics, horticulture, leisure skills, recreation and self-help. Vocational services included job training in building maintenance, food service, Housekeeping for Hire, pre-vocational training, sewing, wood shop and workshop skills. Other areas of emphasis were work habits, attitudes, improving job skills and quality control.

In May, CCARC opened its third community residence in New Britain—the Sy Birnbaum home dedicated to Samuel “Sy” Birnbaum, a former CCARC Director Emeritus who had been a generous contributor donating not only his home but also a 15-passenger van.

Another first occurred in 1984 when CCARC started its first Community Experience Program at South Congregational Church this gave seniors with mental retardation opportunity to enjoy community outings and experience volunteering with children.

The first Bowl-A-Thon, which became an annual fundraising event, was held at New Britain Bowl in 1986. And in November of that year, the John P. McIntosh Work Services Center in Kensington held an open house dedicated to individuals at CCARC. The center provided light industrial work, clerical, maintenance, lawn care and housekeeping services for local businesses.

In 1987, Camp Sloper in Southington opened its doors to children with developmental disabilities. Up until then children with disabilities attended Camp Kiwanee, operated by the New Britain Kiwanis Club. Ruth Kimball helped coordinate and integrate the camping experience for CCARC children.

CCARC also celebrated its 35th Anniversary that year, and in conjunction with Central Connecticut State University and the New Britain Parks and Recreation department began to offer a summer camp for mildly mentally retarded young people.

In the late 1980s CCARC began providing job opportunities for adults with mental retardation through a state-approved Supported Employment Program. The first work sites were Heartland Food Warehouse in Newington, Stop and Shop in New Britain, the Veterans Administration Hospital in Newington and Berlin’s Whole Donut. Larry Floyd and Margaret Symolon were among the first individuals placed. The New Britain UNICO also began organizing dinner-dances for CCARC individuals. These much-anticipated events continue today.

THE 1990s

By 1990, the Supported Employment Advisory Committee (now the Business Advisory Committee) was established to aid in researching and developing new employment opportunities and sites. By that time, 15 CCARC individuals were working at eight area companies.

In 1991, an additional Community Experience Program (CEP) was started which included opportunities for individuals to be involved in the community by volunteering or through recreational activities. The Opportunities for Older Adults (OOA) program at the New Britain YWCA provided a welcome chance for seniors with mental retardation to visit other seniors at Ledgecrest Convalescent Home in Kensington. In September of that year the United Way’s Day of Caring began, and every year since volunteers from companies throughout Connecticut help CCARC and other agencies with special projects.

In 1992, the Jones Drive residence opened in New Britain, and in 1993 Central Connecticut Association for Retarded Citizens officially changed its name to CCARC. This was a positive step aimed at emphasizing the person, not the disability. It was also one of many positive steps in word choices that brought greater dignity to those with disabilities. In April, CCARC opened its first Supported Living Arrangement (SLA) on Jubilee Street in New Britain. After first learning basic independent living skills such as cooking, cleaning, doing laundry and shopping, two

women moved into the apartment. In October, the Oakwood Drive residence opened in New Britain.

In 1994, the Yes, I Can! a self-advocacy group planned a "Random Act of Kindness Day." Members provided juice and coffee at local bus stops as well as to the homeless in the community further helping to raise awareness of the abilities of those with mental retardation. Anne Ruwet became CCARC's Executive Director and the agency moved from Franklin Square to One Hartford Square in New Britain.

By 1995 CCARC was well-known in the community. Advocates and individuals had struggled to bring attention to the needs and abilities of those with disabilities, and they succeeded. The agency continued to grow substantially. CCARC teamed up with "Kids On The Block, Inc.", a puppet program aimed at teaching children in kindergarten through third grade about people with disabilities. In April of that year, a second SLA opened on Harrison Street in New Britain. CCARC hosted a forum to provide information on employing individuals and recreational opportunities for people with disabilities.

In 1997, CCARC changed its name to Central Connecticut Arc and adopted a new mission "to make dreams happen." That year, Person-Centered Planning also was embraced by the agency and services were designed to address each individual's needs.

In the late 90s the New Britain YWCA, collaborated with CCARC Community Employment Program to bring 12 children and several individuals from the Community Experience Program (CEP) together once a week to make murals and holiday props, sing and socialize.

The After School Project began for teens with disabilities to participate in and integrate with non-disabled peers. Together they enjoyed swimming, playing basketball and other social activities. Participants taught also presented Junior Achievement workshops to children in kindergarten through third grade. An Ad Hoc committee of the Board of Directors was formed to determine the future facility needs of CCARC. An outcome of this was the Building Committee.

2000

The Millennium brought many positive changes to CCARC. Two new group residences—High Road in Kensington and Osgood Avenue in New Britain—opened. The CCARC Singers was formed and gave area performances including singing at the State Capitol as part of the "Living Out Loud" Art Show.

Another SLA opened in October 2000 on South Burritt Street in New Britain. And in 2001 plans were unveiled at the 49th Annual Meeting and Dinner for a new home for CCARC. In July of that year CCARC purchased 4.25 acres of land on Slater Road in New Britain. And in 2002, a Capital Campaign to build a new facility.

In 2004, with the support of numerous benefactors, the CCARC American Savings Foundation Education and Training Center opened its doors. Since then, CCARC continued to grow. It now has 13 group residences and five SLAs (Supported Living Arrangements). It hired a full-time business resource manager to find work sites for individuals, and renewed its commitment to build an endowment fund through a newly-created separate 501(c)(3) foundation.

CCARC went from a \$4 million budget in 2001 to \$10 million in 2006. However, perhaps the most significant event is that it has achieved success in bringing greater acceptance of and services to people with mental retardation and other disabilities. A fact that is firmly in stone in front of the Education and Training Center, a testament to the many who gave their lives and hearts to this great endeavor of making dreams happen for those with disabilities.