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News

## Making an impact at 4th annual 'Abilities Walk & Roll'

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By ROBERT STORACE  
STAFF WRITER

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NEW BRITAIN — With a sense of accomplishment, Beth Chapter took part - and completed — the fifth annual “Abilities Walk & Roll” Tuesday evening.

After she walked the one-mile loop around Walnut Hill Park with 40 other disabled residents, Chapter, who is partially deaf and has a learning disability, said she walked to make a statement.

“We want to show people that it is OK to be disabled,” said Chapter, 43, and the president of “Yes I Can,” an organization that works on behalf of the disabled out of the offices of the Central Connecticut Association for Retarded Citizens on Slater Road.

“We can do what everyone else can do,” Chapter said. “We have a job, live on our own and can be independent.” Chapter works in a variety of functions for CW in Bristol.

It was the message of empowerment that those taking part in the “Abilities Walk & Roll” wanted to convey. The 30-minute walk coincided with the 21st anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Mary Ann Smith, a member of the Commission on Persons with Disabilities, which sponsored the event, said the disabled should be encouraged to do more activities in the community. She said the city walk is a good start.

“It’s important for them not to hide,” said Smith, the mother of a son with Down’s Syndrome. “They are just like everyone else, just a little slower.”

Like many of the participants, Sheila Boyle, who also has Down’s Syndrome, said she came for the bonding and the music. After the walk, there was a concert featuring the musical group Locomotion.

“I come for the concerts,” said Boyle, 41. “I love to dance, it’s the best.”

The event, Smith said, was not a fundraiser — rather a chance to highlight the many accomplishments and capabilities of the disabled.

Organizers were hoping for upwards of 100 people, but said the low turnout was due to the heat and the fact that many people were geared up to attend Monday evening.

Because of inclement weather, the walk and roll was delayed to Tuesday.

Following the walk, Mayor Timothy T. Stewart read a proclamation related to the ADA.

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