

## **CONNECTING PEOPLE TO PEOPLE**

Report for MSOCS on

2003-2008 project

Institute on Community Integration

University of Minnesota

University Project Title:

“Agency Factors and Structures Which

Increase Successful Outcomes in

Community Participation and Socially Valued Roles”



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February 2010

## CONNECTING PEOPLE TO PEOPLE

### Executive Summary of Project Results

MSOCS participated in a five-year project from 2003-2008 conducted by the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota, which was funded by the federal National Institute on Disability Research and Rehabilitation. The purpose of the study was to determine what agency factors affected residents' friendships and relationships with ordinary community members and their community membership. The name used for the project by MSOCS staff was "Connecting People to People."

Fifty-nine individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities living in MSOCS group homes across Minnesota began the project. Over the four years of project activity, information was gathered from annual surveys, staff meetings, and interviews with the staff involved, with consistent survey information gathered on 42 of these 59 individuals over the 4 years.

### RESULTS

Results of the project revealed that project individuals benefited from the project in several ways:

#### Community Friendships

17% of the 59 project individuals had community friendships before the project was implemented, compared to 78% of project individuals who reported having community friendships at some point during project implementation. At the end of the project in 2008, those friendships were being maintained for 47% of the project individuals.

#### Community Group Membership

Only 2% of project individuals were members of a community group, club, or association prior to the project versus 42% of project individuals who were members of some type of organization during the course of the project, and 27% of project individuals had these memberships continuing at project end.

#### Community Social Roles

Three percent of project individuals had community social roles prior to the project compared to 37% of project individuals during the time of project implementation, with 27% of all individuals having these roles continuing at project end.

Additionally, for 39% of project individuals, other types of increased contact with community members were reported and 27% of project individuals reported increased family contact. **Overall, 54 of the 59 project individuals (92%) experienced some positive result in community relationships/contact during the project period.**

Of individuals who were not project participants, staff reported at meetings that another 32 people developed community friendships, 23 joined groups and associations, and 24 had new social roles.

In summary, when staff dedicate effort to these goals, in a focused project such as this one, they can be very successful. In addition, the strategies that were learned were applied to other, non-project individuals.

## **CONNECTING PEOPLE TO PEOPLE**

### **FINAL PROJECT REPORT**

Minnesota State Operated Community Services (MSOCS) participated in a five-year study conducted by the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota from 2003-2008. The project was funded by the federal National Institute on Disability Research and Rehabilitation (NIDRR) and the formal research title of the project was “Agency Factors and Structures Which Increase Successful Outcomes in Community Participation and Socially Valued Roles.” The name used internally by MSOCS for the project was “Connecting People to People.”

One of the fundamental intentions of the project was to support relationships between individuals who receive services and ordinary community members. The majority of social relationships for most individuals who receive services are family, staff, and other people with disabilities. To have fully inclusive communities, efforts to connect individuals who receive services with other community members must also be undertaken, and those efforts typically require different skills and practices on the part of agency staff.

Fifty-nine individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities living in MSOCS group homes across Minnesota were selected to participate in this study. This report provides a summary of the project and the outcomes for these individuals, and also information on other individuals served by MSOCS who were affected by project activities but who were not the selected individuals for the project.

### **I. PROJECT DESIGN AND ACTIVITIES**

The purpose of the study was to determine what agency factors affected residents’ friendships and relationships with ordinary community members and their community membership. Some individuals already served by MSOCS already had good connections with community members and in community life. Why are some individuals already well connected, and why are other individuals who are similar to them not well connected?

The project began in the fall of 2003 with the selection process and consent procedures. Thirty homes were selected for project participation (listed in Appendix A).

Focus individuals for the project were selected in clusters of three. A “well-connected” individual was identified, who had some community friendships or community group membership. For each of these well-connected individuals, a matching individual of similar demographic characteristics from the same home was identified, as well as a not-well-connected individual with similar demographic characteristics from another home in the same geographic area. The intention of identifying individuals who were already well-connected was to support agency staff in identifying what they were already doing to support these connections, and to see if these strategies could be applied to other individuals.

One-day trainings were held in 2004 and early 2005 and initial “baseline” interviews were held in each home about current community connecting efforts and staff attitudes toward community connecting.

During the initial interviews with each home, staff was asked for the sources or reasons why each of the selected individuals was well-connected or not well-connected, and about current connecting efforts undertaken in that home.

The initial one-day training consisted of presentation of reasons why relationships are important, seven strategies about connecting, real examples of friendships between individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities and community members, brain-storming exercises for specific individuals the staff supported, and determining next actions to take. Subsequent training meetings were held approximately quarterly, in either individual homes or clusters of homes in the same area. Quarterly training activities consisted of staff members reporting on their activities, successes, and barriers to increasing residents' friendships and community participation; brain-storming and exercises about dealing with barriers, generating new ideas, and making introductions to community members; and setting new goals for the next quarter. Frequently staff attended from other homes also, not just the project homes. Part of the intention of the training was that staff would also develop capacities and competencies that would affect other individuals served by MSOCS, not just the project individuals.

Staff filled out an annual survey on each participating project resident concerning their community activities and relationships. Concluding interview meetings were held at the end of the project in 2008. Lead staff and CRS's also filled out a coordinator survey in the last year of the project.

## **II. PROJECT RESULTS**

Below is a summary of the project outcomes for the 59 individuals, gathered from the annual surveys, the quarterly training meetings, and the interviews conducted upon completion of the project, as well as results for additional individuals impacted during the project period. Information was able to be obtained on 57 of the 59 project individuals.

### **A. FRIENDSHIPS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Of the 59 project individuals, ten project individuals (17%) had friends in the community before the project started, and still did at the time of project completion. Eighteen people (31%) started new friendships since initiation of the project and were continuing those friendships at the time of project completion in spring of 2008. Eighteen project individuals (31%) had a community friend during the project, but those relationships were not being maintained at project end.

Of other individuals who were reported on at various meetings with staff during the project, 22 others who were not actual project participants but who were "other" residents affected by project activities also started and maintained new friendships. Three "other" residents were identified as having community friendships prior to project initiation that were being maintained at project end, and seven "others" found a community friend during the project but that relationship was not being maintained at the end of the project.

These outcomes indicate that the percentage of project individuals who have community friendships went from 17% before the project started to 78% during the project, and 47% of the individuals still had

those friendships at the time of project completion. An additional 32 non-project individuals had relationships/friendships with community members during the project period.

Staff found the following sources for and types of friendships and/or ways of meeting friends for the individuals they support:

- Former staff members
- Former high school friends of residents
- At nearby café
- Minister
- Neighbors
- At local churches
- Staff at other houses
- Staff members' own friends/significant others/family members, who were introduced to the residents
- At local bowling alley
- Other residents' family members
- Manicurist
- Coffee with hairdresser
- At bible groups
- Relationships with high school Key Club students
- Carleton College volunteers

## **B. GROUP/ASSOCIATION/CLUB MEMBERSHIPS**

“Community” groups are groups which ordinary community members join, not groups for people with disabilities. At the time the project started, one project individual (2%) was a member of a group, association, or club before the project started, and still was in the spring of 2008 at project conclusion. Fifteen project individuals (25%) joined a group, association or club during the project, and were still members at the time of project completion. Nine project individuals (15%) joined a group, association or club during the project but were no longer members at the time the project ended.

Other individuals who were reported on at various staff meetings, who were not project participants, included seven who were members of a group before the project started whose membership was continuing at project end. Fourteen “other” residents joined community groups and were still members at project end, and two “others” joined a group, association or club but were no longer members at project end.

These results indicate that 2% of project individuals were members of a group, association, or club, prior to project initiation, compared to 42% of project individuals at some point during the project. By the

end of the project, 27% of these memberships were being maintained. An additional 23 “other” MSOCS residents were or became group members.

Staff reported the individuals joined the following groups/associations/or clubs:

- Elderly Ladies Mission Group
- Softball team
- Eagles club
- Lions’ Club
- Church choir
- Bible study and other church groups
- Walking club
- Singing group
- Open bowling
- Fitness center member
- Nursing home music programs
- Fishing club
- Astronomy class
- Men’s coffee group at Hy-Vee cafe/grocery store
- Arts coalition
- Bingo
- Senior Center
- ARMS (mental health group)
- Weight Watchers

### **C. NEW COMMUNITY SOCIAL ROLES**

At the time of the project start, two project individuals (3 %) had community social roles, and these were maintained at project end. Fourteen project individuals (24%) had a new community social role since the start of the project, and were continuing that role in the spring of 2008 at project end, and six more (10%) had a new community social role during the project that was not continuing at the time of project completion.

For “other” non-project individuals, one “other” resident had a community social role prior to project initiation. Fifteen “others” started a new community social role that was continuing at project end, and eight “other” residents had a new community social role during the project that they were no longer continuing at the time of project completion.

Community social role participation went from 3 % to 37% during the project, with 27% continuing at project end. Twenty-three “other” individuals developed new community social roles during the project, with a total of 16 individuals continuing those roles at project end.

These were some of the community social roles which individuals developed:

- Church usher
- Helped elderly neighbor
- Volunteer at Lyric arts theatre
- Volunteer at grade school autism class
- Church greeter and other church volunteering
- Delivered mail for catering service
- Delivers newspaper
- In charge of recycling
- Volunteer with kindergartners
- Volunteer at PetSmart
- Helped with Meals on Wheels
- Helped with Bread Run to Senior Center
- Volunteer at Clothes Closet and Salvation Army
- Job at Burger King
- Job at Dental Office
- Volunteer at Legion
- Reader at a preschool class
- Volunteer at Humane Society
- Walked neighbors' dogs

#### **D. OTHER CHANGES IN CONTACTS/ASSOCIATIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Twenty-three project individuals (39%) and 28 "other" residents increased other types of contacts and associations with community members during the project, such as being a regular customer and knowing employees at restaurants or convenience stores, more contact with fellow church members, etc. Some of these additional contacts were for individuals who also experienced results in the other categories above.

For eighteen project individuals (31%) and 15 "other" residents, staff mentioned during meetings that they had made attempts to support relationships, memberships, or community social roles for the individuals, but that whatever was tried had not worked out. Again, these efforts overlap with results in other categories for some of the same individuals.

Seven project individuals (12%) and four "other" residents increased their level of physical (versus social) integration into the community since the start of the project. That is, the number of community

places where they went increased, although they did not start relationships with community members at those places.

It was reported that six project individuals (10%) and two non-project residents had the same degree of physical/social integration and contact at the time of project completion as before the project was implemented.

Four project individuals (7%) had decreased levels of physical and social integration since the start of the project. For non-project individuals, information on decreased levels of physical and social integration was not reported.

**Overall, 54 of the 59 project individuals (92%) had some positive outcome in relationships or connections with community members during the project.**

#### **E. FAMILY CONTACT**

Sixteen project individuals (27%) and 22 “other” residents had increased family contact since project implementation. No project individuals and one “other” resident had decreased family contact since the project started.

## OUTCOME SUMMARIES

The outcomes of the project are shown in the following tables. Results for project individuals are shown in Table 1 and for “other” non-project individuals in Table 2. Results are also shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3 in bar graph format.

**Table 1. Project outcomes for project individuals (N = 59)**

Variable	N	%
<b>FRIENDSHIPS</b>		
a. New friendships, continuing	18	31
b. New friendships, discontinued	18	31
c. Already had friendships prior to project, continuing	10	17
<b>GROUPS/ASSOCIATIONS/CLUB MEMBERSHIPS</b>		
a. New members, continuing	15	25
b. New members, discontinued	9	15
c. Already a member prior to project, continuing	1	2
<b>COMMUNITY SOCIAL ROLE</b>		
a. New social role, continuing	14	24
b. New social role, discontinued	6	10
c. Already had a social role prior to project, continuing	2	3
<b>CONTACTS/ ASSOCIATIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS</b>		
a. New contacts	23	39
<b>PHYSICAL INTEGRATION</b>		
a. Increased levels of physical integration	7	12
<b>PHYSICAL/SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND CONTACT</b>		
a. Same degree of physical/social integration	6	10
b. Lesser degree of physical/social integration	4	7
<b>FAMILY CONTACT</b>		
a. Increased amounts of family contact	16	27
b. Less amounts of family contact	0	0
<b>TRIED SOMETHING/DIDN'T WORK</b>	18	31

**Table 2. Project outcomes for other residents living in the homes, mentioned during meetings**

Variable	N
FRIENDSHIPS	
a. New friendships, continuing	22
b. New friendships, discontinued	7
c. Already had friendships prior to project, continuing	3
GROUPS/ASSOCIATIONS/CLUB MEMBERSHIPS	
a. New members, continuing	14
b. New members, discontinued	2
c. Already a member prior to project, continuing	7
COMMUNITY SOCIAL ROLE	
a. New social role, continuing	15
b. New social role, discontinued	8
c. Already had a social role prior to project, continuing	1
CONTACTS/ ASSOCIATIONS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS	
a. New contacts	28
PHYSICAL INTEGRATION	
a. Increased levels of physical integration	4
PHYSICAL/SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND CONTACT	
a. Same degree of physical/social integration	2
b. Lesser degree of physical/social integration	0
FAMILY CONTACT	
a. Increased amounts of family contact	22
b. Less amounts of family contact	1
TRIED SOMETHING/DIDN'T WORK	15

The following bar graphs show project results in another format.

Figure 1. Percentage of project individuals with friendships at the start, during, and after the project (N = 59).

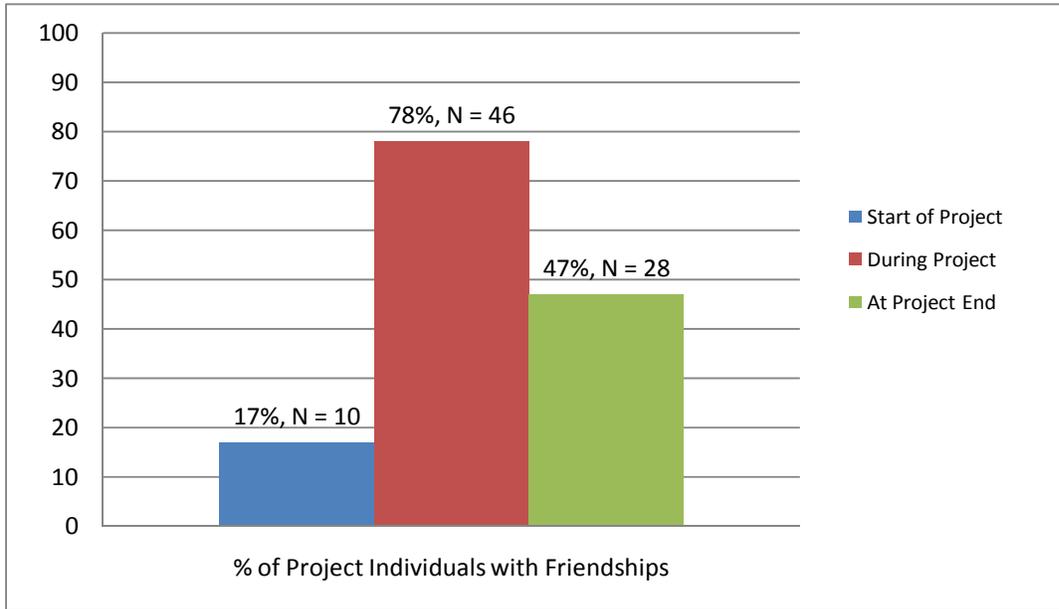


Figure 2. Percentage of project individuals who were group members at the start, during, and after the project (N = 59).

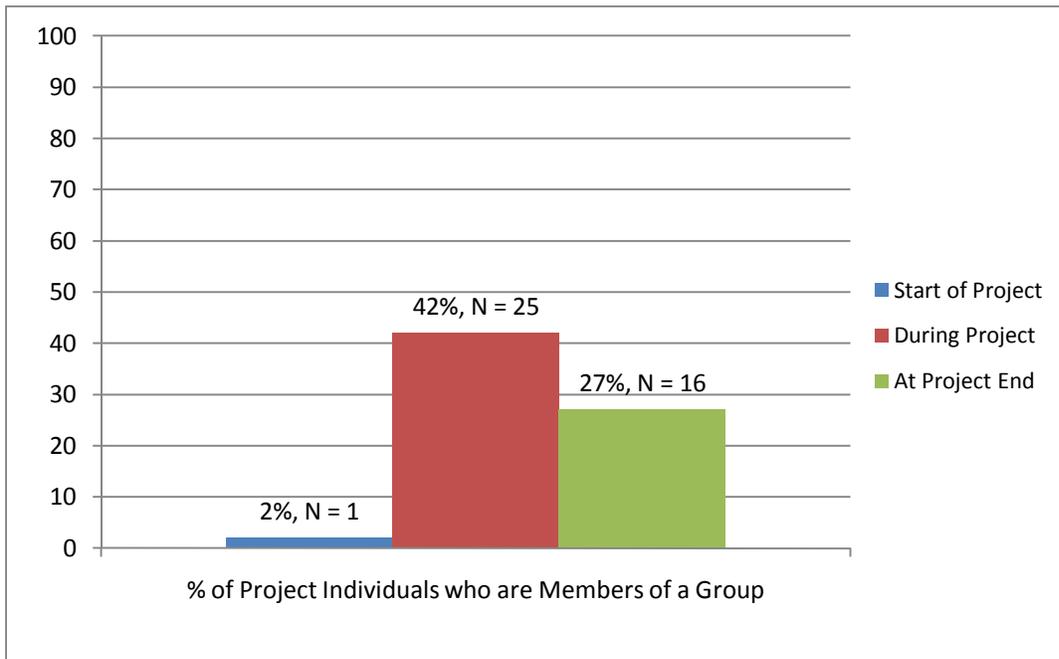
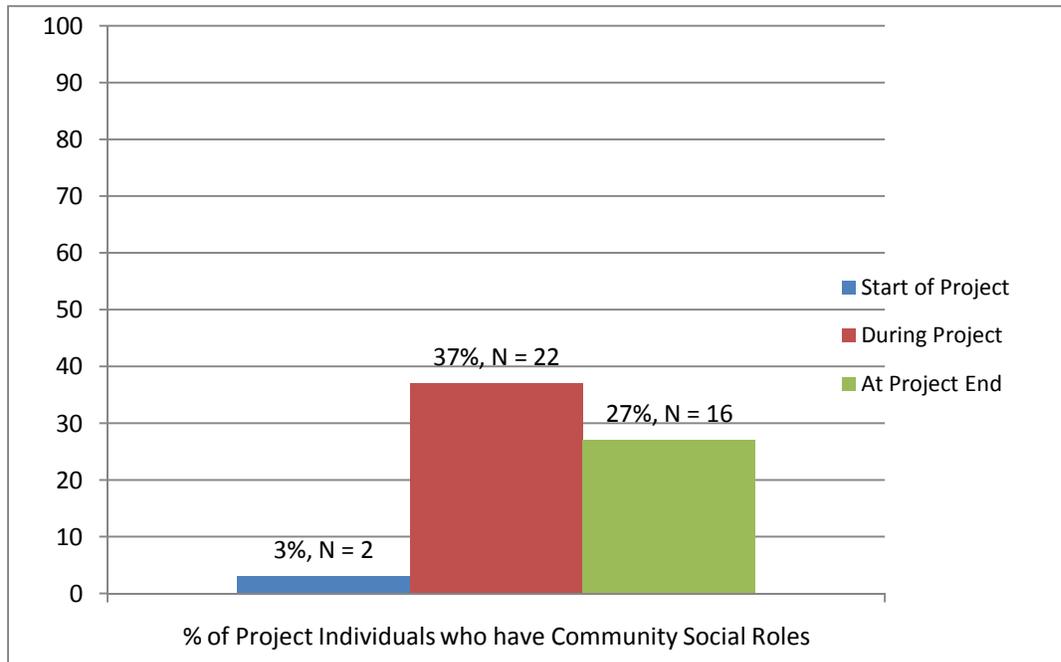


Figure 3. Percentage of project individuals who had community social roles at the start, during, and after the project (N = 59).



### III. OTHER DATA ANALYSIS

An annual survey was filled out for each project participant, concerning community activities and relationships. Consistent survey information was collected for 42 of the 59 individuals over four years, and only information from these 42 individuals was used for data analysis of survey information. In the last year of the project, a coordinator survey was filled out by CRS's and lead workers. Information from surveys was statistically compared.

#### Individual Characteristics

During initial baseline interviews with staff members at the start of the project, one question on the interview was why the individual who was classified as "well-connected" (i.e., already had a community friend, belonged to a community group, etc.) was connected and why the "not-well-connected" matching individuals were not connected.

The staff in virtually every situation attributed the reason to personal characteristics of the individuals -- that is, the "well-connected" person was more friendly, more capable, could talk better, was more outgoing or some other personal characteristic; and/or the "not well connected person" had behavior problems, couldn't talk as well, etc. However, analysis of all demographic data on the surveys (including IQ level, degree of physical impairment, degree of communicative ability, behavior, etc.) did

not indicate that ANY individual characteristic was predictive of degree of connection with community members.

Project results themselves indicate that staff could indeed be successful in connecting even the most challenging individuals. Individuals in the “not well-connected” groups experienced statistically significant differences by project end in overall friendships and relationships with non-disabled community members.

#### Staff ratios

One agency factor that theoretically could be predictive of better community connections was staff ratio. That is, theoretically, if there were more staff, more individual activities could take place in the community. Staff ratio was slightly predictive of better connections, but not at a statistically significant level.

#### Number of meetings attended

One factor that was found to be predictive of more community relationships for a given individual by project end was the number of training meetings which were attended by some staff from the house of that individual. That is, if staff from a given house attended more meetings, the individual from that house was more likely to have a positive result by project end. Staff attendance at meetings might be reflective of other contributing factors, such as CRS and/or lead worker commitment to the connecting efforts.

#### CRS/lead worker attitude

Fifty-two CRS's and lead workers filled out a survey about attitudes toward overall project efforts, and both facilitating factors and barriers they saw about these efforts to connect with community members.

As reflected in Table 3 below, the major barrier to friendship-building goals was seen as staff reluctance to try new things.

**Table 3. Coordinator Survey: Barriers to Friendship - Building Goals. (N = 52)**

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A Little</b>	<b>A Lot</b>
1. Participant's lack of money	28 (54%)	24 (46%)	0 (0%)
2. Participant's problems with transport	36 (69%)	16 (31%)	0 (0%)
3. Participant's reluctance to try new things	23 (44%)	22 (42%)	7 (14%)
4. Participant's ill health	16 (31%)	32 (62%)	4 (8%)
5. Location of participant's home	30 (58%)	22 (42%)	0 (0%)
6. Lack of staff time to support participant in these goals	4 (8%)	44 (85%)	4 (8%)
7. Failure of agency to give staff time to plan and implement	19 (37%)	22 (42%)	11 (21%)
8. Low priority	22 (42%)	22 (42%)	8 (15%)
9. Support staff not doing what they are supposed to do	11 (21%)	39 (75%)	2 (4%)
10. Support staff reluctance to try new things	6 (12%)	21 (40%)	25 (48%)
11. Lack of suitably trained staff	19 (37%)	26 (50%)	7 (14%)
12. Lack of accessible activities in the community	25 (48%)	26 (50%)	1 (2%)
13. Reluctance of people in the community to give time and support	5 (10%)	35 (67%)	12 (23%)
14. Health problems of other people in the home	9 (17%)	37 (71%)	6 (12%)
15. Behavior problems of other people in the home	9 (17%)	37 (71%)	6 (12%)
16. Attitude of people in local community	19 (37%)	27 (52%)	6 (12%)
17. Unrealistic goals set	18 (35%)	28 (54%)	6 (12%)
18. Goals did not reflect what participant really wants	29 (56%)	23 (44%)	0 (0%)

Survey respondents were also asked what they saw as the main organizational barriers to promoting friendship with community members. As shown in Table 4 below, the major organizational barriers were seen as (1) lack of on-going support for these efforts; and (2) agency reluctance to try new ways of working. The items which were least likely to be seen as barriers by respondents were lack of training for staff and lack of commitment by the agency.

**Table 4. Coordinator Survey: Organizational Barriers to Promoting Friendship with Community Members. (N = 52)**

Barrier	Not at All	A Little	A Lot
1. Lack of commitment by agency	23 (44%)	21 (40%)	8 (15%)
2. Lack of commitment by other agencies	17 (38%)	27 (60%)	1 (2%)
3. Lack of funding	19 (37%)	31 (60%)	2 (4%)
4. Lack of training for staff	30 (58%)	15 (29%)	7 (14%)
5. Agency reluctance to try new ways of working	19 (37%)	16 (31%)	17 (33%)
6. Lack of staff who are trained and committed to these efforts	15 (29%)	27 (52%)	10 (19%)
7. Lack of ongoing support for these efforts	11 (21%)	22 (42%)	19 (37%)
8. Lack of cooperation between different agencies	21 (40%)	18 (35%)	13 (25%)

The CRS's and lead workers who filled out the surveys did reflect a high degree of commitment to the values of the project, as reflected in Table 5. Important questions about personal attitudes toward project efforts include:

Question 4: "I am dedicated to implementing these efforts in this agency"

(92% of respondents gave this item a 5 or 6 rating on a 6-point scale of agreement.)

Question 8: "I feel it is my duty to help this agency implement these efforts"

(70% rated this item with 5 or 6.)

Question 12: "It is my personal responsibility to help this agency successfully implement these efforts"

(64% rated it 5 or 6.)

Question 15: "I am happy to implement these efforts to the extent that it improves the lives of people with disabilities"

(69% gave this item the highest agreement rating of 6, the most highly rated item on this scale)

**Table 5. Feelings about Project Implementation. (N = 52)**

Item	Strongly disagree					Strongly agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. I will give my best efforts to promoting friendships if I know it will be seen by the 'right people'	16 (31%)	6 (12%)	1 (2%)	5 (10%)	20 (39%)	4 (8%)
2. Sometimes I wish this agency would not bother with promoting friendship	26 (50%)	22 (42%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
3. I support efforts to promote friendships if they work	2 (4%)	8 (16%)	1 (2%)	8 (16%)	25 (50%)	6 (12%)
4. I am dedicated to implementing these efforts in this agency	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	40 (80%)	6 (12%)
5. I will get most involved if I'll receive recognition for it	19 (37%)	7 (14%)	11 (21%)	8 (15%)	0 (0%)	7 (14%)
6. I get angry when I think about this agency implementing these efforts	32 (62%)	6 (12%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	13 (25%)	0 (0%)
7. I will reserve judgment until I've seen more action	16 (31%)	21 (40%)	5 (10%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	9 (17%)
8. I feel it is my duty to help this agency implement these efforts	7 (14%)	6 (12%)	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	17 (33%)	19 (37%)
9. I would be more motivated if I got personal rewards from this agency for implementing it	23 (46%)	9 (18%)	10 (20%)	1 (2%)	6 (12%)	1 (2%)
10. I feel trapped into implementing these efforts here	21 (40%)	3 (6%)	19 (37%)	9 (17%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
11. If these efforts do not work in this agency they should be discontinued	34 (65%)	13 (25%)	5 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
12. It is my personal responsibility to help this agency successfully implement these efforts	0 (0%)	6 (13%)	1 (2%)	9 (20%)	14 (31%)	15 (33%)
13. I will put effort into implementing these efforts to the extent that I get something in return for it	13 (29%)	8 (18%)	11 (24%)	6 (13%)	1 (2%)	6 (13%)
14. Implementing these efforts in this agency will make no difference	24 (46%)	11 (21%)	9 (17%)	1 (2%)	7 (14%)	0 (0%)
15. I am happy to implement these efforts to the extent that it improves the lives of people with disabilities	7 (14%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (6%)	6 (12%)	35 (69%)
16. I get upset when people in this agency say bad things about promoting friendship	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	21 (42%)	16 (32%)	11 (22%)

Note that the returned surveys were filled out by staff and supervisors who were the most involved in project efforts. The staff and supervisors who were committed to the values and goals of the project were likely the most successful.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the project resulted in very positive results in the three main areas of increasing friendships with community members, membership in community groups and organizations, and new community social roles. In a focused project such as this one, staff, lead workers and supervisors who are committed to the goals of the project can be very successful in increasing relationships with community members, even with individuals with very severe challenges. In addition, the training which was provided was applied by these staff members to other, non-project individuals who receive support from the agency, increasing the competence and capacity for community-building throughout the agency.

## APPENDIX A

The homes which participated in the project were as follows.

### Participating Homes:

89<sup>th</sup>, Brooklyn Park

8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Owatanna

Allen Path, Faribault

Biwabik

Canby Court, Northfield

Cedar, Pillager

Chatham Way, Eden Prairie

Dean, Champlin

Dell Road, Eden Prairie

Fawn Lake, Stacy

Fir, Fergus Falls

Forestview, Baxter

Gilbert

Halper Way, White Bear Lake

Hershey, Lakeville

Hunter Hills, Rochester

Jonquil, Lakeville

Lakeland I, Willmar

Lakeland II, Willmar

Maple Grove

N Street, Brainerd

Park, Faribault

Perham

Richfield

Rochester ICF

Sciota, Northfield

Scott Avenue, Golden Valley

Shumway, Faribault

Sylvan, Pillager

Woodcrest, Mounds View