# RCIL Project Narrative

**Increase number of people with disabilities who can obtain affordable and accessible housing.**

The Rural Center for Independent Living has been working in the rural areas of our state to increase the housing options for people with disabilities. While we have made significant gains in helping people with disabilities access affordable housing, there are many new challenges which need to be addressed. In some of the tourist areas of our state, affordable housing stocks have been reduced by eager investors turning second homes into Air B and B’s. The result has been that people have been priced out of the areas they once called home and forced to move to more affordable and rural areas of the state.

Many low-income motels and apartment complexes in Carson City have evicted their long time, low income residents in order to retrofit the apartments into condos, which are then sold to working families who do not have the finances for the steep prices three bedrooms homes are now commanding. Just this year we saw 48 people evicted from their homes at a weekly motel, in order to retrofit the lodging and resell them as condos. Twenty-three people were evicted from their HUD funded apartments, when the city of Carson closed their apartment building because of structural problems. The scarcity of affordable housing is a challenge throughout the state, Carson City has a vacancy rate of 2.2% compared to the Nevada state rate of 7%, which means if you lose your housing, the chances of finding replacement housing are very slim. Because of the lack of housing, Carson City saw an increase of 27 percent in the homeless population, compared to last year. Another sad statistic on homelessness is that twelve percent of youth experiencing homelessness across the United States were residing in Nevada.

In our rural areas, more and more landlords are refusing to accept Section 8 vouchers, which had been the golden ticket to affordable housing for many years. The average rental is $1,200 per month for a one-bedroom apartment. SSI checks provide $914 per month and the average Social Security check is $1,830. Someone on SSI would have no chance of affording rent and someone on Social Security would need to live on $630 per month after their rent is paid. Even when counties began to acknowledge the housing problems and plan more affordable housing, sufficient affordable housing stocks are many years away.

In Lyon County 30.4% of the population are renters and of those, 39.2% are overburdened. Homeowners account for 69.6% of households and of those 31% are overburdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their incomes on housing costs. Carson City has an almost 50/50 split of homeowners and renters. Thirty-nine percent of Carson City renters are overburdened. Carson City also has a vacancy rate of 2.2% compared to the Nevada state rate of 7%, which means if you loose your housing, the chances of finding replacement housing is very slim. Nye county tells a more harrowing tale, with 51% of the 5,859 renters Overburdened and 29.2% of the homeowners. In Storey County 80% of housing are owner occupied. Thirty-six per cent of those are overburdened. Renters account for 38% of occupied homes in Churchill and 38% of those renters are overburdened. (NRHA Housing study 2022)

Nevada Rural Housing has steadfastly refused to acknowledge the digital divide that impacts Nevada people with disabilities. They require applicants for low income housing to apply online and to update their applications online. People living with disabilities were significantly more likely to lack high-speed internet access at home. Thirty one percent of people with a disability in Nevada, or nearly one in every three, did not have broadband internet at home. According to research done by the PEW Charitable Trust roughly a quarter of Americans with disabilities (26%) say they have high-speed internet at home, a smartphone, a desktop or laptop computer *and* a tablet, compared with 44% of those who report not having a disability, **this leaves an astounding 74% of people with disabilities without the tools needed to survive in our increasingly digital world.**

RCIL has noticed a significant amount of our consumers do not read well enough to complete the many pages required to even apply for low income housing. They do not know how to scan in the required identification documents. These consumers continue to need one on one assistance to complete their housing and benefit applications. They do not have the funds for multiple background check fees, which can range from $35 to $50 each time you apply for a different apartment and saving first, last and a cleaning deposit is absolutely out of reach.

RCIL continues to work to assist consumers to get and keep their affordable housing. This requires a knowledge of the many programs and rules that can assist people with disabilities in providing first, last and cleaning deposits. RCIL has developed relationships with many of the property managers who offer low income housing and our commitment to continue to assist our consumers in maintaining their low income housing has been the reason so many landlords rent to our consumers.

RCIL has focused many of our services on helping people with disabilities find and keep affordable housing. We have long been aware that many of the barriers that keep people with disabilities from maintaining stable housing had to do with their lack of skills to properly budget their funds, misunderstanding their responsibilities as tenants, not having the skills to solve problems in order to maintain a habitable rental unit and underestimating the importance of a strong tenant and landlord relationship. RCIL knows having the proper tools can increase the odds of people with disabilities finding and keeping their affordable housing.

RCIL was thrilled to find the Rent Smart Program. Unlike many generic financial education classes, the Rent Smart Program focuses on the skills needed to get and keep affordable housing. In December of 2022, three of our center’s employees took the instructor course and are now certified to teach the Rent Smart Program to our community. The course consists of 6 Modules, which will be presented twice a week for 12 weeks. After students complete all six modules, they will be presented with a certificate that they can provide to their prospective landlords. Follow up studies done by the University of Wisconsin showed that graduates of the Rent Smart Program were able to pay their rent on time 87% of the time, 100% were able to solve problems related to the safety and accessibility of their housing, because of the problem solving skills taught by the Rent Smart Program, and 75% were able to find safer, more affordable and higher quality housing after taking the course.

RCIL will provide outreach to people with disabilities in our service area in order to assist them with the many steps needed to find and keep affordable housing. RCIL will provide two sessions of the Rent Smart Program to people with disabilities in our service area, to increase the likelihood of finding and keeping affordable housing. RCIL will provide outreach to landlords and property managers in our service are to increase access to affordable housing for people with disabilities and educate them on the benefits of renting to graduates of the Rent Smart Program. RCIL will continue to advocate with county supervisors and commissioners to encourage them to expand affordable housing options, such as allowing Auxiliary Dwelling Units, as an answer to the affordable housing problem that can quickly be utilized.

RCIL has provided affordable housing for or maintained housing for clients in danger of losing their homes for **thirty-five individuals** this year and will increase the number of people with disabilities who can obtain affordable and accessible housing, as a result of the above initiatives.

**Transportation:**

People with disabilities in the rural areas of our state continue to lack access to transportation during the weekends and after 5:00PM. Many people with disabilities cannot get transportation to hospitals and clinics in order to treat their non-emergency health care problems on the weekends. One example of these transportation difficulties was a couple whose spouse had Alzheimer’s and could not drive. The other spouse began to register abnormal blood sugar readings and needed to get to the hospital in Carson City in order to get stabilized. This occurred on the weekend when there were no nonemergency community transportation services available. The couple contacted a friend in a neighboring county and finally was able to make it to the hospital. These non-emergency issues continue to be a problem for people with disabilities in our rural counties. People with disabilities continue to have to rely on private vehicle transportation RCIL will advocate at county transportation meetings in order to encourage the expansion of these vital services. Local county residents of the RCIL Peer support group will accompany the RCIL Advocates in order to gain confidence in their advocacy skills and eventually continue to advocate for improved transportation services independently. RCIL will educate and advocate for more accessible and affordable transportation for people with disabilities in the rural areas of our state.

**Peer Support for individuals with disabilities, including those with traumatic brain injuries:**

RCIL was able to greatly expand our Peer support Group this year and the result has been the continued growth of the group. We currently have 22 members from our service area. The Peer Support group is run by and for people with disabilities in our service area. Each month at the first of the month the members suggest activities for the month and vote on the activities they would most like to participate in. RCIL has encouraged two representatives from each county to take more focused leadership roles, which include advocacy at the county level for housing and transportation. The peer support group includes consumers and family members. The group continues to meet three times per month and has served as an informal advisory group for issues affecting the disability community in our area. RCIL will continue to increase the membership of the Peer Support Group by reaching out to Veterans Groups, Rural Regional, hospitals and support groups for people with disabilities in our service area. Services for individuals with TBI will focus on peer support and education. RCIL will advocate at the state level for additional research on services for TBI individuals.

**Providing Rural services for independent living**:

RCIL will offer two six week classes to low-income people with disabilities in order to increase their skills in budgeting their funds, understanding their responsibilities as tenants, and improve their skills in solving problems in order to maintain a habitable rental unit and understand the importance of a strong tenant and landlord relationship. Classes will be provided for a maximum of ten individuals with disabilities in each class, in order to be able to provide individual help to people taking the class. The classes will also be available on Zoom, so people with disabilities in outlaying counties who wish to take the class will not be hampered by the lack of transportation. This will be a piolet project and we will provide a pre class survey on their skills, an after class survey on their skills and then a follow up call in September to assess whether or not the classes increased their independent living skills of budgeting, problem solving and maintaining safe and secure housing.

**Providing Transition services for students in Nevada, including personalized guidance and assistance in planning for college**.

RCIL will continue to reach out to Vocational Rehabilitation and the high schools in our service area in order to increase the number of individuals needing transition services and personalized guidance and assistance in planning for college and employment. RCIL will utilize the National Collaboration on Workforce and Disability Handbook: Making My Way Through College. Not everyone wants to attend college and RCIL continues to work with students on their individual hopes and dreams. RCIL assisted two students this year in preparing for employment. One has employment in home construction, which was his choice of employment. Another student was assisted in finishing his regular high school education, in order to attend automotive body work classes at Western Nevada College. RCIL will increase the number of students with disabilities supported through transition services.

**Providing Transition services for individuals from institutional settings and increasing the number of persons with disabilities transitioned from institutions.**

RCIL continues to assist individuals in institutional settings in transitioning to community housing. RCIL has been limited by the lack of affordable housing for these individuals, as well as long wait lists for HCBS services. We assist consumers in finding creative solutions for these problems. Many times families are not acquainted with the resources available to them, to keep their oved ones in their own homes. In one case we assisted a family member who was employed washing dishes part time to make ends meet, in transitioning to providing care services to their family member utilizing the HCBS Waiver. They were able to stay at home and continue to receive a small income for caring for their family member. This enabled them to keep the family member, who suffered with dementia in their home. We continue to advocate for individuals who remain in institutions because of violent behaviors and encourage families to rethink guardianship, in favor of powers of attorney. In one case, a combination of a partial conservatorship and powers of attorney was utilized to provide continued funding for the individual, who was no longer able to live independently, because of safety concerns and violent actions against family members who once provided care. RCIL will increase the number of persons transitioned from institutions into community housing.

Goals and Objectives:

Objective: The housing advocate will outreach to individuals, landlords, churches, tribal communities and community organizations in Carson City, Douglas, Storey, Lyon and Nye County in order to locate and assist individuals with disabilities who are in need of housing, maintaining housing or facing eviction.

Activity: The Housing Advocate will Contact a Minimum of three landlords or property managers, churches, tribal communities and community organizations in each county each month, in order to obtain client referrals.

Outcomes: The Housing Advocate will document contacts in each county and document and assist a minimum of four clients with disabilities each month. The results will be reported to the SILC and RCIL Board of Directors Quarterly.

Objective: The Housing Advocate will assist clients with disabilities who need housing or are in danger of losing their housing with referrals to resources they need.

Activity: The Housing Advocate will refer clients with disabilities and their families to community resources that may help resolve their housing difficulties.

Outcomes: The Housing Advocate will document Client contact and assistance referral information on CIL Suite. The number of referrals will be reported to SILC and the RCIL Board of Directors Quarterly.

Objective: The Housing Advocate will increase the number of people with disabilities who receive independent living skills on budgeting, problem solving and improve landlord/tenant communication.

Activity: The Housing Advocate will teach two Rent Smart Classes of 12 weeks Each to a maximum of ten clients per class.

Outcomes: A total of twenty people will complete the Rent Smart Classes and improve their budgeting, problem solving and improve landlord/tenant communication. Class participants will be documented on CIL Suite and provided with a pre survey, after survey and a follow-up call in September on their progress. The results will be reported quarterly to the RCIL Board of Directors and the SILC.

Objective: The Housing Advocate will provide peer support activities to people with disabilities and their families and people with TBI, as directed by members of the group.

Activity: The Housing Advocate will assist in scheduling and encouraging participation of peer support members.

Outcome: The Housing Advocate will continue to increase the membership of the Peer Support Group by reaching out to Veterans Groups, Rural Regional, hospitals and support groups for people with disabilities in our service area. Members and activity will be documented on CIL Suite and reported Quarterly to RCIL Board of Directors and the SILC>

Objective: The Housing Advocate will work with two individuals from each county in our service area to encourage them to advocate at the county level for increase transportation for individuals with disabilities.

Activity: Local County residents of the RCIL will accompany the RCIL Advocates to county transportation meetings, in order to gain confidence in their advocacy skills and eventually continue to advocate for improved transportation services independently.

Outcome: RCIL will encourage the peer advocates to continue their advocacy and will track their activities on CIL Suite. Results that improve access to transportation will be reported to the RCIL Board and the SILC quarterly.

Objective: The Housing Advocate will Increase the number of individuals with disabilities receiving transition services to college or employment.

Activity: The Housing Advocate will outreach to Vocational Rehabilitation and High Schools in our service area in order to assist in the transition of individuals with disabilities to college or employment.

Outcome: The number of individuals with disabilities receiving transition services to college or employment will be documented on CIL Suite and the number reported quarterly to the RCIL Board of Directors and the SILC.

Objective: The Housing Advocate will work with individuals in need of transition from nursing homes to community homes.

Activity: The Housing Advocate will outreach to a minimum of four nursing homes per month, in an effort to transition people with disabilities in institutions to their homes in the community of their choice.

Outcome: The number of individuals who are transition will be documented on CIL Suite and reported to the RCIL Board of Directors and the SILC Quarterly.