



# Increasing the Capacity of Local Disability Organizations to Make Livable Communities



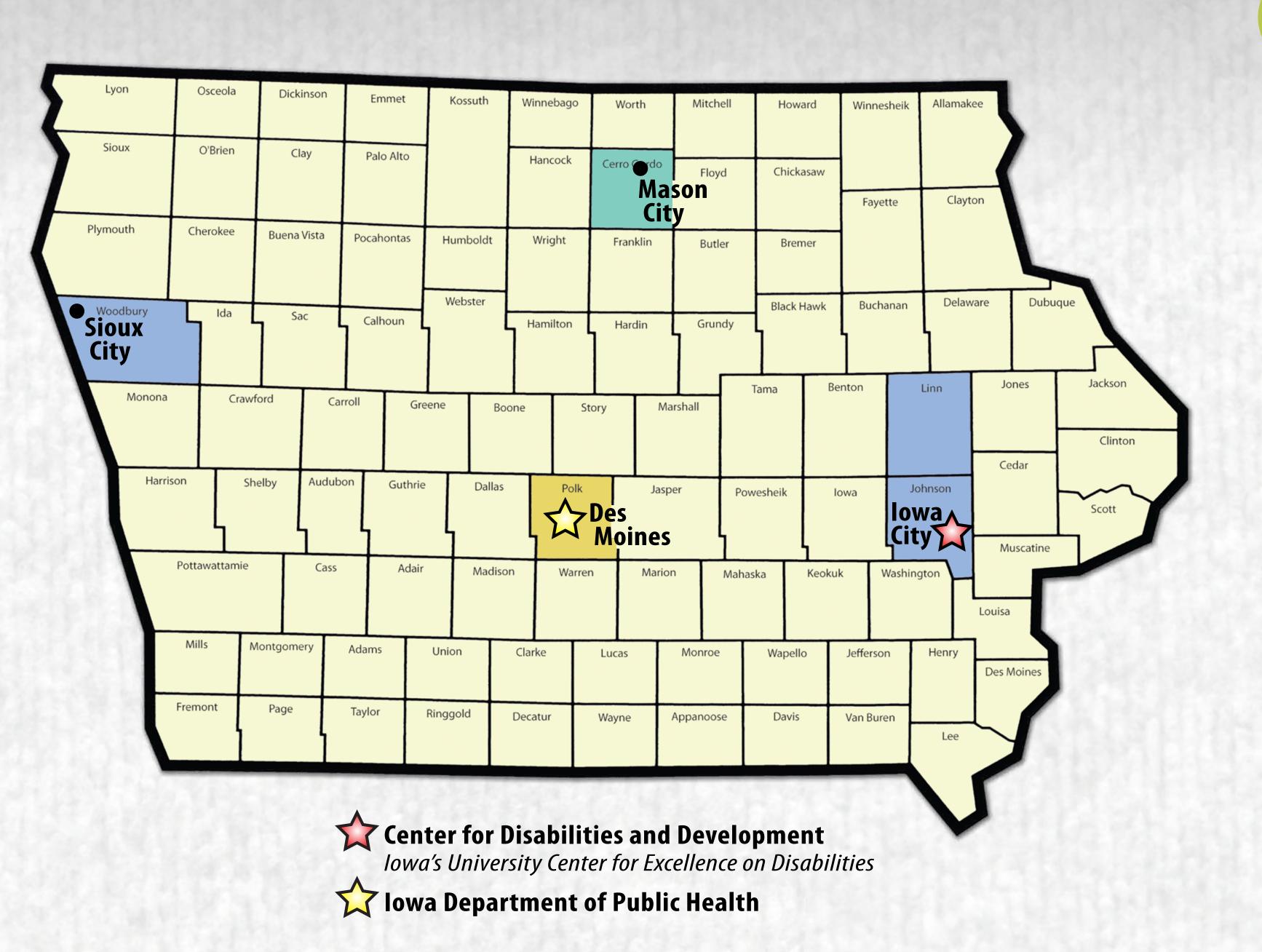
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## **Ab**stract

In this unique collaboration between the Iowa UCED and the Iowa Department of Public Health, the Iowa Community Access Project (CAP) promotes the full inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of community services and life through needs assessment, education, action and advocacy. Project staff from both agencies train, mentor and certify Access Specialists in specific disability issue areas and specific roles. At this time there are two focus areas: Disability Emergency Preparedness and Accessible Communities. Community partner agency volunteers and staff with disabilities are serving as Access Specialists in five certifications roles: Disability Personal Emergency Preparedness Trainer; Emergency Preparedness Community Planner Consultant; Accessible Health Facilities Surveyor; Accessible Emergency Shelters Surveyor; and Accessible Community Consultant.





#### **Participants:**

- Three Rivers Center for Independent Living: Disability Emergency Preparedness
- lowa City
- Access to Independence: Disability Emergency Preparedness
- Des Moines
- Easter Seals of Iowa: Accessible Community
- Mason City
- Northern Iowa Vocation Center: Disability Emergency Preparedness and Accessible Community

## **CAP Goals:**

### **Program Goal:**

Work to include people with disabilities in relevant emergency preparedness disaster planning in Iowa.

A network of community-based Access Specialists will be developed who 1) Improve community planning for emergencies to assure that the needs of members with disabilities are met, and 2) Improve the preparedness of lowans with disabilities for handling emergencies.

#### **Program Goal:**

Increase the accessibility of community public health services and facilities to people with disabilities in Iowa.

A network of community-based Access Specialists will be developed who will work to improve both physical and programmatic access to community-based public health services, private health related facilities, and disaster shelters through a program that provides accessibility surveying, technical assistance in identifying low-cost solutions, and rewards to organizations who become accessible.

## Discussion/Results

The quantitative and qualitative data from the first two years of this pilot program suggest that this model of community intervention has been effective and has great potential in addressing other disability issues. Access Specialists have:

- Reached over 380 lowans with disabilities with personal emergency preparedness training.
- Implemented community strategies:
  - o Recruited local businesses to donate or offer discounts on emergency kit items.
  - o Working with managers of assisted living, elderly housing and group homes to assist in certain steps of personal emergency planning.
- Attended county Emergency Management meetings and provided technical assistance to address Functional Needs Support Services (FNSS) issues.
- Conducted site accessibility surveys at 130 health care facilities, 34 health and recreation facilities and 65 disaster shelters.
- Created community strategies to improve accessibility:
- o Developed list of community providers of Brailing, interpreter services, accessible signage and other accommodations for sharing with the follow-up recommendations.
- o Worked with the state telecommunications relay provider to maintain on-line staff training about how to effectively use the relay system.
- o Created "you tube" video for survey follow-up and community training about accessible parking which includes demonstration of benefits by a person with physical disabilities and a physician testimonial.

# **Access Specialist Comments and Stories**

- After telling her personal story at an EMA meeting, "the light bulb went on for the emergency manager concerning special needs sheltering. He realized that people with disabilities have families and normal lives just like everyone else and that we do not want or need to be sheltered separately".
- A hospital's Director of Support Services concluded that the recommendations about a very inaccessible clinic needed to be shared with the hospital architect.
- Access Specialists report an increase in their self-image and respect from the community as having useful information and skills.
- The community partner sites report they are reaching new audiences and also that there is an improved perception of their organization's capacity and abilities.



## For more information, please contact:

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