

Groups merge to help seniors, disabled

Friday, October 24, 2008 6:31 AM EDT

By Pamela McLoughlin, New Haven Register Staff

NEW HAVEN — People with disabilities and older citizens often find themselves with a lot of the same struggles with issues such as housing, transportation, benefits, mobility and the overall fight to keep control of their lives.

So instead of just running into each other in the process of trying to help their clients get services, the Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut and the Center for Disability Rights are joining forces to better serve clients in both categories by creating an information hub.

The result: Connecticut's first Aging and Disability Resource Center, aptly called Community Choices because part of the goal is to empower older adults and individuals with disabilities to advocate for themselves.

The model of combining such efforts has already caught on in other states, said Beverly Kidder, director of the Aging Resource Center at the Agency on Aging of South Central Connecticut.

Although Community Choices was officially unveiled Thursday morning, its telephone line has been in effect since Oct. 1 and already there have been 45 calls, Kidder said.

She said the move is a natural and the groups are really blending.

Combining efforts is cost effective and maximizes staffing, she said.

Marc A. Gallucci, executive director of the Center for Disability Rights, said it "never made any sense to divide people based on disability and age."

He said some folks are born with disabilities, others acquire them during younger life and others develop them as seniors.

"Right now, people are confused about where to go; this is a natural," Gallucci said. "We (both groups) share the same belief that people should have control of their lives. We're on the same page."

Michelle Duprey, New Haven's director of the Department of Services for Persons with Disabilities, was there to show her support.

“I think it’s great because there is a lot of duplication of services,” Duprey said.

Pamela A. Giannini, state director of the Bureau of Aging Community and Social Work Services, was there as well, saying it’s a great concept to give folks one-stop shopping that will make seeking help less daunting and hopefully get them services before they experience a crisis.

Rick Famiglietti, a transition coordinator at CDR, dedicated to helping folks make the transition from nursing home to independent living, another issue faced by older residents as well as the disabled, called the merger a “win-win.”

Jessica Sirella, a Community Choices counselor who will spend time both at the Agency on Aging office in New Haven and the CDR in West Haven, said the new system will “empower” clients.

Sandra Roberts, supervising advocate for the Center for Disability Rights, said the joint effort is a “huge asset” to the community.

“It’s a long time coming,” Roberts said with a big smile.

For more information, call the new resource center at (888) 992-8637.