Measuring the impact of Accessible, Affordable, and Inclusive Housing and Community Spaces

During the past 50 years, there have been dramatic changes in the lives of individuals with disabilities. For some, communities have become more inclusive and accessible. Historically, many adults with disabilities lived in large institutional settings with minimal opportunities to socialize. Others lived with parents or in group homes. Main Street Connect was founded and designed to promote accessibility and inclusion in the design and operation of community living for people with and without disabilities; in many respects, Main Street is a radical – yet long overdue – departure from isolated and often paternal housing options for adults with disabilities. Main Street may serve as a prototype for the future as our society becomes more inclusive and accessible for all citizens.

Main Street’s apartments and community center are designed to promote psychological and emotional wellness, social engagement, and intellectual opportunities and options for its residents and members. Similarly, for family members of individuals with disabilities, Main Street’s model is designed to increase community support and connections, decrease concern about their family member’s future, and increase opportunities for self-care and leisure-time activities. Their ultimate vision is that we all live in a world where people of all abilities thrive—are included, feel connected and have abundant choices and opportunities.

Beyond a visceral sense that inclusive housing and community spaces feel good, how do we measure the impact of initiatives like Main Street on individuals, families, and communities? Currently we know little about the effects of inclusive housing and community spaces.

Main Street Connect is developing a mixed methods research agenda to examine the impact of its new housing and community center in Rockville on individuals, families, and the community. We seek partnerships with agencies and foundations to support research that carefully examines the impact of our innovative approach to creating a more accessible and inclusive community for individuals with disabilities, their families and the community at large.

Among other things, our proposed research agenda will be asking questions such as:

- How do inclusive housing and community spaces affect the well-being, independence, social engagement, and life satisfaction among residents and members with disabilities and their Family members?
- What impact do inclusive housing and community spaces have on residents without disabilities? What impact do inclusive housing and community spaces have on the community?

Through partnerships with faculty at the University of Maryland, Main Street plans to develop a series of studies that will advance our understanding of inclusive communities.