

**CMS REAL CHOICE SYSTEMS CHANGE  
HOUSING WORK GROUP  
COMMUNITY LIVING EXCHANGE COLLABORATIVE**

**Moderator: Jay Klein** – *CHANCE/ILRU*

**Participants:** Twelve participants from New Hampshire, Delaware, Illinois, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin attended the May call.

**Guest Resource Persons: Richard Duncan** is currently the Senior Project Manager at the Center for Universal Design, part of the College of Design at North Carolina State University. He has served as the Principal Investigator on a number of Center projects including and Safe and Accessible Homes for Independence, and The Excellence in Universal Housing Design Award. One of Dick's recent projects, Affordable and Universal Homes for Independence, assisted Habitat for Humanity to improve its capacity to produce universal housing. Another project, Universal Design Homes, opened a universal demonstration home in Atlantic City, NJ in May 2002.

Mr. Duncan has spent over 20 years in the field of architectural accessibility and universal design in residential, public, and transportation environments. He has extensive experience in the design, costs, materials, and products in residential and non-residential settings. His work includes the issues of affordable housing and home and repair financing and transportation accessibility.

He is editor of *A Blueprint for Action*, and was project director of *Access Boston: Design Guidebook for Barrier Free Access*. Mr. Duncan serves on the boards of Housing Works and the North Carolina Sustainable Building Design Competition. He is a graduate of the planning program at the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

**Minutes:** Today's call topic is on the issue of Universal Design. Mr. Duncan will give a short presentation on the issue and then will answer questions from the participants.

**Richard Duncan:** The Center for Universal Design [the Center] is involved in many things, including published materials, which are available on the website <http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/>. We do research at the center, including the impact of product design, housing and urban design. The Center also does curriculum development for all age groups. These are some of the ways in which the Center is involved in universal design.

A definition for Universal Design is the “design of products and environments in ways that allow use by the broadest range of people possible, regardless of age, ability or size and without resorting to specialized design.” This applies to products, housing, and non-residential environments among others. There was a handout sent out on the “Seven Principles of Universal

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Design.” These principles and guidelines are the touchstone of the foundation from which the Center develops and implements its practically oriented design ideas.

Without reading the handout, principles 2-7 primarily focus on the good usability features that are important when designing a universal environment. The first principle distinguishes a universally designed environment from one perhaps thought of as usable on a functional level. What we at the Center ask of the designer is that the design is appealing to all users, and it is that sense that leads to the notion of an integrated design, so usability features of the product, home or building are integrated into the overall design concept. In this way the universal design concept becomes more mainstream rather than thought of as something that is different or separate.

For example, if one were to compare universal design to assistive technology, which is important, video captioning 20 years ago was not widely available and was expensive. Today, video captioning is commonplace and is required by federal law. Everyone can access this technology much more easily now, and because it has become so accessible and commonplace it is considered more of a universal design feature rather than an assistive technology.

The field of Universal Design began because the disability movement and disability field brought about major change over the past several years. The field of accessible design came from this movement. About 20 years ago the founder of this Center, Ron Mace, began to see the great benefits that accessible design was bringing to the public at large, which is what gave him the idea for the concept of universal design. Accessible design is still available; for example, a ramp can be built onto a house for accessibility measures. A ramp could be considered a good accessible design feature, but is not considered a good universal design feature.

A feature such as a level entrance that everyone can use together and in the same manner is what our center considers a universal design feature. The Center promotes universal design concepts such as level entrances in new construction, rather than retrofitting a newly constructed home with accessible features, which can be more costly.

One of the challenges experienced in the field, particularly with respect to design professions, is the struggle in understanding what universal design is as opposed to accessible design. The Center tries to make distinctions as often as possible to help people understand the differences and to help push people in the direction of universal standards.

The Center’s goal is to have all homes built with universal design features in them, and in that light, if and when that happens, the inevitable customization everyone does to their homes will be much less expensive and require less effort.

Another handout, titled “Universal Design in Housing,” has four sections. It goes through a gamut of information on universal design incorporated in the home and discusses the benefits to having this design. Falling under this piece is universal product characteristics, a list of products with information you may want to look for when incorporating universal design into a home. The last portion is a resources section for information about universal design.

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From the Center's work with demonstration projects and groups over the years, I've developed a list of five features, which I believe form the essential basics for any universal home.

1. Level entrance into the home. Getting into the home is the biggest problem for people, and is one of the more costly design features in building a home.
2. Including wider hallways inside the home (at least 42 inches wide). Shorter hallways are beneficial, as well.
3. Wider doorways (34- to 36-inch wide door). We've become more accepting towards pocket doors as they've become better in performance and function.
4. Having key function areas on the first level of the home. Bedroom, full bathroom, kitchen, laundry facilities.
5. Easy-to-use hardware and controls in reachable locations, including door handles, light switches, outlets, thermostat controls and the electrical panel.

If these five features are included, a builder has come a long way in making a home universally designed.

**Linda BIMBO:** Can you give a short answer that will explain the fundamental difference between universal design and ADA driven accessible standards? What are the incentives to get people to embrace universal design?

**Richard Duncan:** The first question relates to the ADA being a code-driven requirement at a minimum, as opposed to universal design being about creative design, which tries to look at the normal variations in human abilities and to design and integrate products that can be used by all of those people. The ADA oftentimes has limitations and only carries certain requirements, which are primarily focused towards nonresidential settings.

**Linda BIMBO:** What would make builders and developers, other than from the goodness of their hearts, want to use universal design?

**Richard Duncan:** This gets into the next part of my discussion. Right now there are only a few areas where people who are building housing are compelled to utilize usability features. The fair housing amendment act, which is focused on some multi-family housing with limited accessibility requirements, and state requirements for multi-family housing with fully accessible requirements are a couple of the requirements that exist.

Universal design has come from a market-based approach, which is to convince producers that it's a good idea to learn about, and to convince consumers that its beneficial to use these design ideas. We've seen a huge increase in the number of homes being built that implement universal features, but it still represents a small portion of the millions of units that are built every year.

For an individual to request universal design features, the savings over a lifetime should be significant. Right now AARP is the only national consumer-driven group that is pushing universal design as a normative model. One would think that with the aging of society, people would be gravitating towards universal design, however the numbers have not been large enough to move the industry to latch onto the concept.

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**Martha Younger-White:** I wanted to add that I review the Section 811 applications for Illinois. I went to a HUD training that was interesting, and found out that HUD gave more points to developers who built housing with visitability features than to those developers who did not. Some of the participants asked what visitability was, but the HUD representatives could not answer that question.

**Richard Duncan:** Visitability is my next topic point. When you get beyond state- or nationally-mandated requirements for various levels of accessibility, you arrive at visitability. In my experience, visitability is an ordinance-based attempt focused only on limited features in housing. These ordinances will look different depending upon what state and even locality has designed them. I think there are a couple of places in Illinois with citywide ordinances.

**Martha Younger-White:** Yes, we have a few communities with these ordinances: Champagne, Urbana, Bolingbrook, Naperville and the City of Chicago. They all have different aspects in their attempt at visitability.

**Jay Klein:** It would be interesting to hear who on the phone has cities within their states with visitability standards in place.

**Judith Pipher:** Our Housing Authority is using universal design combined with visitability in housing in Milwaukee.

**Richard Duncan:** I heard from a couple of folks in the housing authority in Milwaukee that a Hope 6 project had about 95 percent of the housing units that were visitable. Is that correct?

**Judith Pipher:** Yes, that's correct. In some projects, 100 percent of the units are visitable.

**Richard Duncan:** That is just incredible. I have it on my to-do list to get up to Milwaukee and visit.

**Judith Pipher:** Most of the places are built with universal design bordering on accessibility, with some of the units already accessible. Some of the private homes are already accessible, with elevator shafts built in as stacked closets.

**Jay Klein:** I'm wondering what people know about this. Universal design is a fairly new concept, which is starting to take hold in several places and with legislators.

**Richard Duncan:** Legislation regarding universal design, Representative Schakowsky (IL) has introduced the Inclusive Home Design Act of 2005, for the second or third time. The legislation is focused on all newly constructed, federally funded and assisted, single family houses and townhouses to meet minimum standards of visitability for people with disabilities.

I mentioned at the outset that there is confusion in the terms. The most frequent occurrence is when people use the term "universal design" as if it is the latest term that refers to all things accessible. We spend a lot of time making distinctions for people in the terms. In the area of

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housing, this is somewhat easier, because most of the housing already built have no form of accessibility. In this respect the Center is essentially beginning on a clean slate, and only attitudes with which to contend. In the non-residential environment, the education is a bit more difficult, as the concepts of design integration, design quality and mass appeal are integral to this environment. The Center does a lot of education for builders and designers around the Fair Housing Amendment Act.

If federal legislation and local ordinances do not work, there are other things that can happen. The secondary mortgage market players, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, can be pushed to promote universal design mortgages and building incentives. Builders, developers and individual households would receive financial breaks for homes that have certain features. This would go beyond what they have accomplished to date in rewarding households that have people with disabilities living in them. This would make it more broadly accessible and available.

**Martha Younger-White:** In Illinois our housing authority did a compromise bill with the legislature to give out grants to homebuilders to try visitability in their models homes. We are in our third year of giving grants, only to find out what we thought in the beginning that adding visitability components to the homes does not add cost. We are hoping that there may be a next phase coming soon making this a permanent available grant.

**Richard Duncan:** We've worked with a number of housing agencies, but have not followed up to see how they are doing. Alaska, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina. There is a tremendous interest going on in these states.

**Victor Orija:** In Delaware, the Coalition on Housing is pushing for this, as well as AARP.

**Gerald Stolp:** Oregon has a visitability statute put into place during the 2003 session, which requires all housing that receives funding from the Oregon Housing and Communities Services Department have visitability features. It does require at least one no-step entrance, 32-inch entry doors, visitable common areas, wider doors, reachable electrical outlets and light switches.

**Richard Duncan:** It sounds as if you have an enhanced visitability requirement.

**Gerald Stolp:** There were some things that we are still lobbying for, including fully accessible bathrooms.

**Richard Duncan:** We (at the Center) try to remedy those situations by looking at design and figuring out something that people can buy into. It's amazing what you can do by moving some fixtures around.

**Judith Pipher:** One other thing happening in Wisconsin is the Wisconsin Builders Association gave a course on aging in place. Many of the guidelines they use incorporate universal design.

**Richard Duncan:** One of the reasons I gravitate towards demonstration projects is that they tend to do a tremendous educational function, whether you have the building community, design

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community, legislators or the public. The two demonstration homes we did in New Jersey and Atlantic City are available for touring.

**Richard Duncan:** There is really uneven practice out there. We've talked so far about new construction and the advantages in saving renovation dollars down the line. We also deal with issues for people who already live in their homes. We provide limited technical assistance in these areas. Folks want to know more about it, that's partly why we do the publications we do. There is a group called the National Home Modifications Action Coalition that has been around for 10 years. The group is focused on people that are already in their own homes and in getting them home modifications.

**Martha Younger-White:** We found our home modification resources all over the map. This is a good resource for us.

**Lynne Miles:** We formed a home modification task force about a year ago, and we were just looking at the resources available in the state. We first started researching how people could receive home modifications, and we put together a decision tree, which will be transformed into a web format.

**Richard Duncan:** That's great. I'd like to see how that works when its finished.

That's what I have for this presentation. I'd be happy to answer any more questions. Thanks for participating.

Participants discussed possible topics for the next meeting. All participants are invited to send suggestions for monthly call topics to either Jay Klein at [jay.klein@unh.edu](mailto:jay.klein@unh.edu) or Pamela Robertson at [pamela.robertson@unh.edu](mailto:pamela.robertson@unh.edu).

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 16, 2005 at 3:00 pm (est).