



PRESS RELEASE

Baptist Community Ministries Awards \$655,000 to Disability Rights Louisiana

This three-year Transom Grant will support Disability Rights Louisiana's work with formerly incarcerated people with disabilities in the Greater New Orleans area.

New Orleans, Louisiana – June 23, 2021

Disability Rights Louisiana (DRLA) is excited to announce that it has been awarded a \$655,000 Baptist Community Ministries (BCM) Transom Grant to support the next three years of its Financial Access Inclusion and Resources (FAIR) Program. FAIR works to improve the employment, financial, and reentry outcomes of formerly incarcerated people with disabilities. Between July 2021 and July 2024, with funds from BCM, JPMorgan Chase & Co. (JPMC), Greater New Orleans Foundation (GNOF), and the RosaMary Foundation, FAIR will provide financial coaching and case management services to approximately 200 new clients in the Greater New Orleans area, who have disabilities, are formerly incarcerated, and want to work.

Approximately 40% of people incarcerated in the United States report having at least one disability. Disproportionately high unemployment and poverty rates among people with disabilities are causes and effects of their mass-incarceration. After incarceration, people with disabilities are often unable to participate in vocational and reentry programs, due to lack of accommodations or connections to disability-related services. Prior to FAIR's inception in 2019, "we could not find reentry programming that was built around the needs of people with disabilities," reflects Program Manager Libby Whiteside, who led the development of FAIR, "so we designed this program to address the complex issues that often derail people with disabilities as they try to secure jobs, make-ends-meet financially, and stay in the community after incarceration."

Trained in financial coaching, benefits counseling, and disability-informed case management strategies, FAIR staff collaborate with clients to identify their financial goals and to address their prioritized needs. Case Manager Pat Holmes explains, "We break down those hidden barriers to employment. For example, a client might need help accessing food, shelter, and medical care before they are ready to work. Then, they might need help figuring out how earnings will impact their disability benefits. Once they have steady income, clients may want help addressing credit issues or constructing a savings plan so they can have a stable place to live. FAIR is about meeting individuals where they are at." DRLA has found that applying holistic case management and financial coaching strategies yields higher employment rates, improved financial security, and lower recidivism rates for formerly incarcerated people with disabilities.

FAIR was piloted between 2019 and 2021, with funding from Kessler Foundation, GNOF, and JPMC. Clients experienced employment rates that were over twice as high as those experienced by formerly incarcerated people with disabilities who received vocational rehabilitation services alone. Despite impacts of COVID-19, FAIR captured a cumulative total monthly income increase of approximately \$53,376 among 53% of clients. FAIR documented a cumulative total of \$50,492 in reduced debt among 45% of clients, largely in thanks to partnering organization Justice Accountability Center of Louisiana who helped address FAIR clients' legal financial obligations. Furthermore, only 5% of FAIR clients served during the pilot were re-incarcerated. "We are proud to house the premier financial coaching and case management program focusing on individuals at intersection of disability and reentry--we are incredibly grateful to BCM for their support so we can continue and grow our services to this historically underserved community," says DRLA's Director of Community Advocacy, Debra Weinberg.

About Baptist Community Ministries

Baptist Community Ministries (BCM), one of the largest private foundations in Louisiana, is committed to improving the physical, mental, and spiritual health of people and communities in the five-parish Greater New Orleans area. BCM invests in the community by making Grants and by providing direct services. Learn more by visiting www.bcm.org.

About Disability Rights Louisiana

Disability Rights Louisiana protects and advocates for the human and legal rights of all children, adults and seniors with disabilities. Our work aims to empower the disability community to live an integrated life, free from abuse, neglect and exploitation. Learn more by visiting www.disabilityrightsla.org.

Contact

For more information about DRLA's FAIR Program, please contact Program Manager Libby Whiteside via telephone at 504-522-2337, ext. 139 or via email at ewhiteside@disabilityrightsla.org.