



A Background Paper, in preparation for a convening on Healthy Youth Development: Reaching California's Minority Youth with Disabilities

Hosted by: National Health Foundation and The HSC Foundation
Date: Thursday, September 27, 2012; 8:30am – 3:30pm
Location: The California Endowment Center for Healthy Communities
1000 N. Alameda Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012

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Abstract: Minority youth with disabilities have traditionally been excluded from youth development opportunities due to program design and lack of access. The upcoming day-long convening will bring together youth and experts in the field of youth development with providers, employers, researchers, funders and advocates who are working to engage minority youth with disabilities in youth development efforts. This background paper discusses the concept of “youth development,” specific examples of employment and volunteerism, and the unique circumstances that impact minority youth with disabilities in accessing these opportunities. The paper concludes with snapshots of current research and activities taking place in the areas of the corresponding panel discussions.

Introduction

Youth with disabilities is a group that have traditionally been excluded from youth development (YD) activities.¹ In addition, minority youth often live in communities that have fewer youth development opportunities.² California is a majority-minority state, with 60.3% of the population indentifying as other than non-Hispanic white.³ These data and other research indicate an acute need for youth development opportunities for minority youth with disabilities, which have traditionally been designed with white, native English speaking students without disabilities in mind.⁴⁻⁶ The existence of disparate services for minority youth with disabilities was highlighted recently in the Los Angeles Times:⁷

In its December series, The Times found that for autistic children ages 3 to 6 – a critical period for treating the [condition] – the [California] Developmental Services department spent an average of \$11,723 per child on whites in 2010, compared with \$11,063 on Asians, \$7,634 on Latinos and \$6,593 on blacks.

This background paper describes the context in which we will discuss YD, as well as the current status and needs of minority youth with disabilities. In preparing this background paper, no literature was found that specifically addresses youth development activities in minorities with disabilities, indicating additional need for focus in this area.

In September 2012, National Health Foundation and The HSC Foundation, with funding from The California Endowment, will host a meeting to address these issues, bringing together several key stakeholder groups. The purpose of this meeting is to:

- Foster learning opportunities for a targeted pool of California service providers and advocates on how to target and reach minority youth with disabilities;
- Provide a venue to hear and learn from non-traditional entities working with minority youth with disabilities;
- Inspire and facilitate new partnerships and collaborations between groups working to address these issues;²
- Focus on specific areas of youth development: employment and volunteerism; and
- Inform a white paper to be widely disseminated that presents innovative strategies to reach this target population and impart healthy youth development outcomes.

Meeting participants are asked to review this background paper and come prepared, based on personal experience and knowledge, to discuss best practices and opportunities for growth regarding efforts to engage minority youth with disabilities in employment and volunteerism. Furthermore, the hosts of this meeting hope to encourage networking and collaboration amongst attendees. Participants are encouraged to meet new faces and brainstorm potential new partnerships. At the close of the meeting, participants will be asked to report on their perceptions of the meeting and what kind of new connections have been made. In particular, the hosts will be following up with attendees after the event in an effort to support those new partnerships.

Youth Development

What is Youth Development?

According to a definition developed by The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Y), youth development is, “a process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent.”¹ YD activities are wide-ranging and may include, but are not limited to: employment and training, continuing education, community service, economic development, and health and human services.² YD typically occurs during adolescent years, and for youth with disabilities, preparation for transition should begin by age 14.⁸ YD activities encompass five developmental areas: working, learning, thriving, connecting, and leading.^{1,9} These areas are explored further in a paper by NCWD/Y which classifies YD activities and outcomes by developmental area.¹

The September meeting focuses only on employment and volunteerism opportunities, which encompass all of the described developmental areas.

Why is Youth Development Important?

Youth development is an important precursor to making positive adolescent and young adult behavior choices.¹ YD sets the stage for school achievement, community involvement, and successful transition into adulthood.^{1,10} YD programs prevent negative behaviors and promote positive development of, “social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive,” elements.¹¹ Beyond individual impact, YD activities are an investment in families, communities, and economic health.² Given the meeting's focus on employment and volunteer YD opportunities, the following sections explore the specific benefits of such activities.

Employment as Youth Development

Opportunities for employment are inclusive of all activities leading up to gainful employment; including: internships, networking opportunities, mock interviews, career planning, job searches, career based workshops or fairs, vocational training, and mentoring.¹ Youth employment is often used as a measure of YD success because of the connection between work experience early in life and continued employment.^{2,12} Knowing this, the disparity in youth employment between those with and without disabilities, 10.5% versus 25.9%, is troubling.¹³ The disparity widens as youth transition, where 20.3% of adults with disabilities are currently employed compared to 69.4% of those without disabilities.¹⁴ These statistics indicate that people with disabilities experience barriers to employment.⁸ Removing these barriers is a key issue because a robust labor market, inclusive of people with disabilities, is vital to a healthy economy and reduced usage of government programs.⁶ The benefits of increased employment opportunities for minority youth with disabilities include:

- *Economic outcomes.* Being gainfully employed creates financial independence, which in turn reduces an individual's need for government programs.⁶
- *Employment outcomes.* A review of 22 studies on predictors of post-school success among youth with disabilities found that work experience in high school is a strong

predictor of success after graduation. Those who were employed in high school were more likely to continue their education, be employed, and live independently.¹²

- *Social outcomes.* Having a job in high school increases the social networks of youth with disabilities, improving potential future work opportunities.⁶
- *Health outcomes.* Having a job is a known social determinant of health and decreases the likelihood of poor health outcomes.^{15,16}

Volunteerism (or Service) as Youth Development

Volunteerism and service involve connecting individuals to the community.⁵ The Tarjan Center at UCLA is dedicated to supporting young people with disabilities as community volunteers.¹⁷ Partner organizations have engaged youth with disabilities through disaster relief, community revitalization, and hospice care for the elderly.¹⁷ Some opportunities may expose young people to a career path. The majority of literature on volunteerism focuses on service learning (SL) opportunities. Service learning is an integrative approach to education that combines classroom instruction with community service projects.¹⁸ SL improves youth understanding of community needs while validating the classroom lesson as authentic in the community.⁵ The benefits of increased SL opportunities for minority youth with disabilities include:

- *Employment outcomes.* SL is known to improve career awareness and vocational skills.^{5,18}
- *Academic outcomes.* Participating in SL improves academic outcomes for students of all racial, ethnic, and disability statuses.^{18,19} SL projects for students with disabilities have included academic skills such as language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.⁵
- *Social outcomes.* Students with and without disabilities exposed to SL opportunities experience enhanced self-esteem, leadership and communication skills, cultural awareness, socializing skills, motivation, teamwork, sense of independence, and personal and social responsibility.^{5,18}

Recommended Youth Development Strategies

This meeting will explore current, successful YD programs and strategies for engagement, and develop ideas for future opportunities. Following are elements of a comprehensive youth development strategy recommended by the National Youth Employment Coalition that meeting attendees should be mindful of throughout discussions:²

- Multi-year investment that starts early and is tailored to the individual;
- Individualized YD plan that responds to the youth's needs and goals;
- Opportunities for youth to engage with both peers and adults in work settings;
- Workforce training and preparation;
- Educational opportunities that utilize critical thinking and higher-order skills;
- Higher education adapted to our changing world;
- Options to move through different careers; and
- Community support for youth to become engaged citizens through work.

Minority Youth and Youth with Disabilities

Minority Youth

The minority population in the United States and California have increased over time.^{3,20} California has the second largest majority-minority population in the country with 60.3% of the state population identifying as other than non-Hispanic white.³ Nationwide, minorities experience a higher rate of disability than non-Hispanic whites.^{4,20} The following explores select racial/ethnic group make-up in California.

Latinos

Nationwide and in California, the Latino population is younger than other racial and ethnic groups and is the fastest growing.^{3,20,21} Over time, it can be expected that the number of youth with disabilities of Latino origin will increase. California has the largest Latino population of any state with 14.4 million residents who represent 38.1% of the state-wide population.³ In California, for every white child living in poverty, there are three Latino children living in poverty as well.²²

Asian Americans

California has the largest Asian population of any state with 5.8 million residents who represent 15.5% of the state-wide population.³ Twelve percent of Asian children in California live in poverty, compared to 10% of white children.²²

American Indian and Alaska Natives

California has the largest American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) population in the United States.³ There are more than 1 million AIAN residents in California who represent 2.8% of the state-wide population.³

African Americans

African Americans are the second largest minority in the United States.³ In California, there are 2.9 million African Americans who represent 7.7% of the state-wide population.³ African American children in California experience poverty at a similar rate as Latino children, with 31% currently living in poverty.²²

Youth with Disabilities

In California, 1 out of every 20 children has a disability.²³ Among all people with disabilities in the state, half identify with at least one minority group.²⁴ It can be assumed that the racial/ethnic distribution is approximately equal among youth; exact data is not readily accessible. Having a disability as a young person creates an obstacle to being employed, continuing education, living independently, participating in the community, and accessing public services such as healthcare.⁸ In addition, youth with disabilities have typically been excluded from mainstream YD programs whose purpose is to build competencies so youth may be successful in achieving these outcomes.^{1,2} These young people bring diverse life experiences to the table and including them in youth development activities creates added benefit to all.

Youth Development for Minority Youth with Disabilities

Minorities with Disabilities

Literature indicates that Latino and African American children in California are more likely to experience poverty than their white peers.²² In addition, minorities with disabilities experience higher levels of poverty than their non-minority peers.⁴ Complementary research has shown that poor families with a child with a disability experience poverty more severely than poor families with a non-disabled child.²⁵ These statistics indicate that minority youth with disabilities experience a “double jeopardy” when it comes to being at risk for poverty. Compounding the problem, current literature establishes poverty as a determinant of poorer health.¹⁵

People with disabilities from all racial/ethnic groups are at risk for not completing high school, not continuing postsecondary education, being unemployed, and having low wages.⁴ It is likely that minority youth experience these risks at a higher level than non-minority youth.⁴ Knowing that minority youth with disabilities are at a higher risk for these outcomes indicates an immediate need for youth development efforts to mitigate these effects.

Access to Youth Development Opportunities

The majority of human services are created for the, “dominant values, beliefs, and biases of the larger society.”²⁰ Until recently, this meant an English-speaking, Anglo group without disabilities.^{4,20} Thus, youth with disabilities have traditionally been excluded from youth development opportunities.¹ Even more, these programs are not optimized to serve minority youth, who face additional social, cultural, and language barriers.⁴ Cultural differences result in different desires and expectations for services.²⁰ Additionally, differences in language use and proficiency create barriers to access and perception of cooperativeness when receiving services.²⁰

Organizations should be aware of how differences within cultures may impact program delivery within the same ethnic group. For example, there is an outstanding amount of internal diversity within the American category of Latino/Hispanic race/ethnicity, due to the numerous countries of origin which make up this category. This results in differences in beliefs, practices, and understanding around disability and expectations of service.²⁰ Regardless of cultural background and other characteristics, it is important to recognize that any classification does not negate the need to treat each person as an individual with unique needs.²⁰

High school service learning programs are often segregated between students with and without disabilities.⁵ This practice limits students with disabilities' exposure to diverse service learning opportunities and is contradictory to the emphasis on inclusion found in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004.⁵

As previously noted, youth with disabilities are underemployed. This is due in part to difficulty in finding appropriate opportunities, inadequate preparation and support from school leadership, and uncertainty from employers on how to find support for employing a person with a disability.⁶ Intangibles, such as low expectations of people with disabilities, may also impact a young person's success in obtaining a job.⁶

Finally, minority communities, which are more likely to be poor, have fewer access to organizations and resources that support youth development activities.²

Background for Panel Discussions

This meeting includes participation from individuals representing all levels of influence on youth development activities. At each level, minority youth with disabilities should be regarded and utilized as stakeholders, decision makers, and informants in all activities.⁴ Following are recommendations and current practices by key organizations. This information provides some context for current activities in the field of youth development for all youth with disabilities. The activities described are not meant to be a comprehensive listing, but to provide a current snapshot of the field.

Young Adult and Family

Young adults and their families are a key part to successful YD efforts. In a paper developed by participants at the *Blazing the Trail: A New Direction in Youth Development & Leadership* meeting organized by NCWD/Y, ten action items that young people with disabilities can do to improve outcomes for YD were identified¹⁰. Among these outcomes are: connecting to the community, and participating in internships and other work experiences.

These recommendations are supported by a paper authored by Dr. Richard Luecking, President of TransCen.²⁶ In his paper, Dr. Luecking advocates for families of children with Down Syndrome to support their child's development by bringing them to their own jobs, assisting their child in finding volunteer opportunities, and encouraging discussion about future dreams to encourage fields of interest for a future career.²⁶

Innovations in Research and Service

To improve access to YD activities for minority youth with disabilities, Stodden, Stodden, Kim-Rubnow, Thai, and Galloway⁴ developed the following recommendations for future research:

- Expand the knowledge base about minority people with disabilities;
- Improve research skills and methodologies to be culturally responsive;
- Understand and prevent researcher bias to avoid misleading findings; and
- Enhance capacity for dissemination of information about and to underserved populations with disabilities.

The Institute for Educational Leadership has a library of publications to inform education policy and programs. Among their subject areas is workforce and disabilities. In this area they have developed a portfolio of informative papers that serve as a resource for youth, employers, and policy makers on engaging youth with disabilities in the workforce. Among these publications is a paper titled, *The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities* which provides information to youth on how to decide to disclose their disability to their employer.²⁷ Another publication for employers is titled, *Tunnels and Cliffs: A Guide for Workforce Development Professionals and Policymakers serving Youth with Mental Health Needs* which provides guidance on how to assist youth with mental health needs into the workforce.²⁸

Post-Secondary Education Perspective

Post-secondary education institutions have an important role in increasing work and volunteer opportunities for minority youth with disabilities. Among research recommendations, Stodden et al.⁴ have prioritized the need to determine the effectiveness of programs at this level aimed at enhancing the self-determination of minority youth with disabilities.

Among programmatic efforts, a number of activities are currently taking place at post-secondary education institutions within California and nationally. In California, a partnership between Los Angeles area employers and universities increased job placement and school dropout among minority high school students in California.²⁹ In the Bay Area, UC Berkeley and the World Institute on Disability (WID) partnered to create the New Leaders Internship Program. The Program provides young adults with disabilities from underserved areas the opportunity to participate in internship programs with WID.³⁰

On the national front, The Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities (WRP) is an opportunity for college students and recent graduates with disabilities to connect with federal and private employers for permanent or summer work.³¹ The program is managed by the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and the Department of Defense's Office of Diversity Management & Equal Opportunity (ODMEO).³¹

The private sector has also made recruiting youth with disabilities a priority. Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities (COSD) is a professional association of over 600 colleges and universities and more than 500 employers to create internship opportunities and recruiting programs specifically for college students with disabilities.³²

Employment and Volunteerism Sectors

Many of the previously discussed opportunities involve partnership with organizations in the employment and volunteerism sectors.^{29,31,32} Business leaders have also taken it upon themselves to develop initiatives to enhance opportunities for youth with disabilities. Among them is the US Business Leadership Network (USBLN[®]) which developed the TOWER[™] Initiative.³³ The purpose of the TOWER[™] Initiative is to create tools that expand work, mentoring, and internship opportunities for youth with disabilities by collaborating with businesses and youth.³³

Conclusion

This background paper is intended to spark discussion and future employment and volunteer opportunities for minority youth with disabilities. As noted, there is a serious lack of literature available on this topic leaving room for future research. Knowing the minority population is expected to grow; the diversity within it must also be acknowledged and catered to. The organizations highlighted are leaders in the field and should be encouraged to continue their excellent work and innovative ideas. Partnership and communication with these organizations, and new ones, will foster additional youth development opportunities for minority youth with disabilities.

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