

# **Disability, Diversity, and Intersectionality in Centers for Independent Living: Nine Case Studies**

**Prepared by:**

**Sharonlynn Harrison, Ph.D.**

**Richard Petty, M.B.A.**

**Darrell Lynn Jones, M.A.**

**Judith Holt, Ph.D.**

**Stanley Holbrook, M.B.A., M.P.M., M.T.S.**

**Marilyn Hammond, Ph.D.**

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Independent Living Research Utilization  
1333 Moursund  
Houston, TX 77030  
713.520.0232 (V/TTY)  
713.520.5785 (Fax)  
<http://www.ilru.org>

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**IL-NET Project Director and Editor:** Darrell Lynn Jones

**Publications Staff:** Brooke Curtis, Sharon Finney, and Dionne Rauseo

**Individualized Technical Assistance:** Free, timely, and individualized technical assistance is available to you and your center or SILC as a service of the IL-NET. Email Paula McElwee, IL-NET Technical Assistance Coordinator at [paulamcelwee.ilru@gmail.com](mailto:paulamcelwee.ilru@gmail.com).

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## Introduction

Disability and diversity are two words that centers for independent living (CILs) know well. One of the basic definitions of a CIL is that it is cross-disability and inclusive. Every three years the State Plan for Independent Living in each state must identify unserved and underserved populations and set goals and objectives for outreach to those populations.

Intersectionality is a fairly new word in the independent living arena but one that has gained attention for a very good reason. We're all recognizing that it's not enough to just declare that we are inclusive of everyone. There must be intentionality in the way a CIL organizes itself and conducts business. To authentically reach the full community of persons with disabilities, CILs must address all of the overlapping or intersecting social identities of their audience. There needs to be a culture within a CIL that reflects that all are truly welcome and it is safe to participate regardless of race, color, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identification, age, religious practice, as well as physical, mental, and emotional capability. The concept of "intersectionality" was first offered by law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, who identified as a black feminist, to bring attention to how different types of discrimination affect black women and other minorities.<sup>1</sup> She described how being black brings one set of social responses and being a woman brings another set of responses. The general concept has actually been around since the 19<sup>th</sup> century but many human rights activists began to take more notice in the 1980s.

In the past decade disability rights leaders began to more deeply articulate the complex questions around who is being served and included in the independent living and disability rights movements. We're beginning to understand more fully how all systems of power come together to cause marginalization of members of our communities. Race, disability, gender, etc. do not and cannot exist separately from each other and CILs must be conscious and responsive to all aspects of a human being who seeks to be a full participant in the governance, operation, and program activities of a CIL or desires to be at any of the tables in their communities.

There is a growing body of evidence that people with disabilities who are also members of other minority groups experience a multiplier effect on the barriers they face to achieving independence and self-determination. The Department of Health and Human Services Advisory Committee on Minority Health described living as a member of a racial or ethnic minority group with a disability as a “double burden.” In their report, *Assuring Health Equity for Minority Persons with Disabilities: A Statement of Principles and Recommendations* (2011), the committee concluded, “As people with disabilities and people of racial/ethnic minority status face health and healthcare disparities that put them at disadvantage in their quality of life compared to their counterparts, the health and wellness of these populations are public policy concerns that warrant increased attention and action. It is particularly important to raise awareness about the dual burden of inequities that minorities with disabilities face.”<sup>2</sup>

Section 21 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended states

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newstatesman.com/lifestyle/2014/04/kimberl-crenshaw-intersectionality-i-wanted-come-everyday-metaphor-anyone-could>

<sup>2</sup> <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/assets/pdf/checked/1/acmhhealthdisparitiesreport.pdf>

- (1) **RACIAL PROFILE.**—The demographic profile of America is rapidly changing. While the percentage increase for white Americans is 9.7 percent the percentage increase for racial and ethnic minorities was much higher: 43.0 percent for Latinos, 12.3 percent for African-Americans, and 43.2 percent for Asian Americans and other ethnic groups.
- (2) **RATE OF DISABILITY.**—Ethnic and racial minorities tend to have disabling conditions at a disproportionately high rate. In 2011—
  - (A) among Americans ages 16 through 64, the rate of disability was 12.1 percent;
  - (B) among African-Americans in that age range, the disability rate was more than twice as high, at 27.1 percent;
  - (C) for American Indians and Alaskan Natives in the same age range, the disability rate was also more than twice as high, at 27.0 percent.

Independent Living Research Utilization has been taking a look at what CILs are doing around disability, diversity, and intersectionality through a project funded by the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services. The objective of the project is to shine a light on some of the effective approaches that are making a difference in diverse communities across the country. ILRU has identified nine CILs that demonstrate progress in services, programs, and outreach for racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse groups. The CILs were nominated by their peers and participated in in-depth case studies which are summarized in the following pages.

The study was conducted in collaboration with Public Research and Evaluation Services utilizing a three-phase process that included a focus group, key informant interviews, and discussions with CILs. The 38 nominated CILs were narrowed down to the nine selected by a panel of reviewers.

All nine centers expressed reluctance about being seen as “exemplary” but chose to share their stories, understanding that what they are sharing is about the progress on an ongoing journey. Although the initiatives vary from center to center, there were some significant commonalities that have relevance for all centers for independent living:

- Show unconditional respect.
- Have objectivity.
- Step outside the box.
- Ask for input and listen.
- Avoid assumptions.
- Take the time that is necessary to connect.
- Staff the right people.

For more information on the Disability, Diversity, and Intersectionality in CILs project, see <http://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-diversity>.

# Nine CIL Case Studies





# Access Living (Chicago, IL)

*Building Trust in Immigrant and Latino/Latinx Communities*

I feel like everything we do is a work in progress.... We are a little uncomfortable with being raised as the icon on this issue because we still have a long way to go.

~ Marca Bristo, President and CEO

## Organizational Description and Capacity for Diversity, Intersectionality and Cultural Competence

Established in 1980, Access Living is committed to fostering an inclusive society for individuals with disabilities in the very diverse city of Chicago. With the organization being located in Chicago, most of the individuals who come to Access Living are people of color. Racial/ethnic demographics are included in the table below for the service area, consumers, staff, and board.

### Demographics

Diverse Groups: U.S. Census Categories	Access Living's Community (%) (n = 2,720,556)	Access Living's Consumers (%) (n = 1,830)	Access Living's Staff (%) (n = 58)	Access Living's Board (%) (n = 24)
Caucasian/White	32.3	19.0	52.0	79.0
African American/Black	30.7	52.0	28.0	13.0
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	28.9	10.0	14.0	4.0
Native American/Alaskan Native	< 1		2.0	
Asian/Pacific Islander	6.1	2.0	5.0	4.0
Other Race	< 1			
Two or More Races	< 1	1.0		
Race Unknown		15.0		

Data were obtained for individuals residing in Chicago, IL from <http://www.city-data.com/races/races-Chicago-Illinois.html>

The board is committed to diversity and cultural and linguistic competence and brings organizational improvements in this regard through the strategic plan. Access Living is continually working to increase diversity on its board. Staff used a consultant to identify pipelines of qualified individuals from various communities. For each staff position, they seek to determine if there are culture-specific

professional organizations that might help them identify members of diverse groups to consider for job postings.

As a requirement of the state of Illinois, Access Living has a linguistic and cultural competence plan that includes the goals and objectives the organization seeks to achieve for serving diverse individuals. Access Living also has an Organizational Culture Committee, which is charged with cross-education of the staff around topics related to diversity. For example, recently a Muslim staff member provided training on disabilities through the Muslim lens. The Cultural Committee also hosts special cultural celebrations, such as Mexican Independence Day. African American staff members provided training regarding disability and the Black experience. They presented showcases, displays, highlights of important people, and vignettes about significant events, such as the great migration of African Americans from the South to the North. The staff enhanced the training further by speaking personally about their own experiences as African Americans, some of whom also had disabilities.

Training around cultural competence is provided periodically, including topics about transgender individuals, race, and disabilities. New employees are also trained on the affirmative action policies of Access Living and the importance of equal opportunities. Ethics discussions are also convened with new employees and include information on what various terms mean and how to avoid discriminatory practices.

There are many ways that communities become informed about Access Living. Last year, staff conducted a series of media campaigns that were included in a program highlighting essential things to know about Chicago hosted by the local NBC 5 television station. The organization's media specialist has also developed a robust list of media outlets, which include those utilized by diverse communities. This enables the organization to reach many different communities with press releases as well as through social media. Access Living has its own building and has hosted several major community events and regular meetings of external organizations. Two examples include the Paratransit Riders, who conduct community organizing around transportation and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Metropolitan Tenants Organization (MTO), which deals with nondiscriminatory rental and tenant problems. Both organizations have members from diverse communities. When sharing their site, Access Living makes sure their publications are available. Many individuals have learned about the organization through these gatherings. Word-of-mouth is still a main source of referrals.

## **Progress Made in Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence**

...Access Living does a ton of coalition work in our advocacy and that positions us to have a lot of referring relationships where partners that we work with are from a community of color. ~ **Marca Bristo, CEO**

At Access Living, outreach efforts to diverse communities are data-based, intentional, and included in their strategic plan. For example, the decision was made to attend a variety of summer street festivals and cultural events that were in diverse, underserved communities as part of the plan to expand outreach. In addition, a review of the data revealed a need for improved outreach to the Latino

community; therefore, a position was created and filled by a member of that community. With this position, a community organizing group called Cambiando Vidas (Changing Lives) was convened.

This unit includes Latino members with disabilities who go into the community to meet face-to-face with other members. Cambiando Vidas is led by a staff coordinator at Access Living and comprised of a group of Spanish-speaking volunteers. They developed a flyer that read: “Do you have a disability? Do you live in a Latino neighborhood? Do you need support? Do you need medical equipment? Then come to Access Living.” This flyer was created in both English and Spanish because some who have been in the U.S. for a long time might know how to speak English, but may not know how to read it. Access Living volunteers disseminated the flyer on foot to Latino neighborhoods, schools, city officials (the Commissioner and Alderman), and community partners.

Workshops were also held in community libraries where information about Access Living was provided. As a result of this focused outreach, more individuals from the Latino community come to Access Living for services and are engaged in its work. This remains a priority because the numbers are still disproportionately small compared to the size of the growing population.

In doing this work, Cambiando Vidas helps address issues faced by New Americans with disabilities. They have found it is vital to build trust with this population. Once trust is achieved, Cambiando Vidas also delivers “know your rights workshops,” highlights the services of Access Living, and teaches that a wide array of services is available to New Americans in Chicago, a welcoming city. As part of its advocacy work, Cambiando Vidas fought to get a bus line reinstated in a Latino neighborhood with access ramps installed.

Through an effort of Cambiando Vidas, durable medical equipment is donated to uninsured individuals. With this initiative, they pick up and distribute accessible furniture and equipment that individuals donate to Access Living. At first, there was hesitancy in taking these donations due to limited storage, but with Cambiando Vidas, the items are stored for a minimal time, if at all, and instead are moved quickly to individuals who need them.

Access Living staff have found that many communities have limited knowledge regarding the disability-rights movement. Therefore, the staff provide training on this topic and their services at school and community organization events and fairs to increase knowledge and awareness. They also make sure that agencies of influence in communities have their brochures and information about the organization. Parents from Chicago public schools often seek help from the Access Living Education Policy staff member who specializes in assisting with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). There is also a disability rights law component at Access Living that addresses the ADA and housing. Many people who have experienced discrimination are referred to Access Living for that service.

## **Efforts in Local and National Work to Improve Diversity and Cultural Competence**

Access Living also participates in events that impact local and national initiatives affecting diverse communities. Members are active with the Black Lives Matter movement, including police interactions

with racial/ethnic communities and people with disabilities. They are also active with the Juvenile Justice Coalition, an organization with a two-pronged mission of reducing youth delinquency and creating a more just juvenile justice system. Access Living has also made public statements about issues that are important to diverse communities, such as speaking out about Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and the White supremacist incident in Charlottesville.

Access Living's advocacy work involves leadership development and community organizing where specific groups select the issue they want to address. For example, the Advanced Youth Leadership Power (AYLP), an advocacy group of young people with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 30 years-of-age, chose to work with the Dignity in Schools Campaign (DSC). The members are from diverse racial, ethnic, and disability backgrounds. This initiative sought to address and dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline.

In Chicago, a 15-year-old young man with a disability was killed by the police when he was having a meltdown, even though medical personnel advised the family to contact police in the event of a crisis. Two years following the young man's death, Access Living was contacted by the family to seek assistance in developing a law in his name. Compilation of the data around police violence and people with disabilities has been important to the writing of this bill. This has led to connections with different community organizing groups across the country. Access Living has also worked with the ACLU to educate and support connecting plaintiffs for their excessive force case. AYLP has been working on the bill, which has not yet been introduced at the time of this writing. They are currently garnering support and gaining signatures from other disability-rights organizations. AYLP hopes to help communities understand the links between disability, racial, and economic justice.

Access Living also hosted the first meeting of the newly reformed National Coalition for Latinxs with Disabilities (NCLD), an organization that embraces the term Latinx, a new gender-neutral word used to refer to individuals of Latin American descent. The purpose of the organization is to address the human rights of Latinxs with disabilities and to ensure that their intersecting identities are accepted. Currently, the organization is applying to become a 501(c)3.

The Raise Your Hand Coalition is an initiative of parents that seeks to ensure quality public education in Chicago and Illinois. Access Living worked with this coalition and added the disability angle. Raise Your Hand fought for schools that were being closed in diverse, low-income communities, while the city was investing in schools located in more affluent neighborhoods.

Chicago Freedom Schools is an effort that teaches leadership development and social justice around the oppression of specific groups. It provides training to *Freedom Trainers* from across the country who come to Access Living to learn about the disability-rights movement and its style of community organizing.

## **New Directions for Cultural Competency and Diversity**

Access Living is starting a disability-consulting institute. It will include information about topics such as Disability Awareness 101, reasonable accommodations, and self-identification. They have also developed a disability self-assessment checklist that is useful for organizations, such as funders to

ensure that their grantees are inclusive and accessible. They have included additional items that assess intersectionality of disability and race/ethnicity/culture/language identities. The organization also plans to develop a Racial Justice Committee that will tackle issues presented by the Racial Justice workgroup that was convened last year.

## **Closing Comments**

Access Living recognizes that some of the progress they have made regarding serving racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse groups is because of past mistakes. The team at Access Living acknowledges that errors will be made and that even while trying to serve diverse communities, it will not always be perfect. However, they encourage centers for independent living (CILs) to continue to move forward in the work. At Access Living, the staff and board understand that the job of serving diverse communities is always in progress; therefore, strategies are consistently evolving as needs arise.





# Central Coast Center for Independent Living (Salinas, CA) (CCCIL)

*Working with Diverse Community Organizations adds the Disability Cultural Perspective*

How do you sustain a culture of inclusivity? By making sure it's always at the top of your list and not just something you have to address every year because you have to check it off somewhere. Also, looking at the trends, your policies and talking to your staff. ~ **Elsa Quezada, Executive Director**

## Organizational Description and Capacity for Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence

Central Coast Center for Independent Living Center (CCCIL), is a nonprofit organization located in Salinas, California. Their geographic area comprises a rural agricultural community and includes many veterans because they are near a former army base. CCCIL serves three counties with predominantly Latino populations, including 56% in San Benito, 55% in Monterey, and 32% in Santa Cruz. Racial/ethnic demographics are included in the table below for the service area, consumers, staff, and board.

### Demographics

<b>Diverse Groups: US Census Categories</b>	<b>CCCIL's Community (%)* (n = 769,319)</b>	<b>CCCIL's Consumers (%) (n = 544)</b>	<b>CCCIL's Staff (%) (n = 19)</b>	<b>CCCIL's Board (%) (n = 8)</b>
Caucasian/White alone	30.3 - 57.7	35.0		38.0
African American/Black alone	1.4 - 3.5	5.0		38.0
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	33.5 - 59.2	49.0	95.0	13.0
American Indian /Alaskan Native alone	1.8 - 3.1	1.5		
Asian alone	3.4 - 6.8	2.5		
Other Race		3.0	5.0	13.0
Two or More Races	3.4 - 4.1	4.0		

\* If applicable, community demographics represent a range of percentages.

Data were gathered from the U.S. Census for individuals residing in San Benito, Monterey, and Santa Cruz Counties.

CCCIL's employees, administration, and board reflect the consumers who they represent and serve. All members of the staff are bilingual and bicultural. The organization convenes ongoing professional skills development for the board and staff to make sure they are current on the status, needs, and resources of the communities they serve.

Because CCCIL's consumers comprise many individuals of the Latino culture, they make sure their materials emphasize an understanding of that group as well as their perspective of disability. For example, CCCIL recognizes that in the Latino culture, the whole family is important. Therefore, the organization seeks to acknowledge and show respect for the importance of family by creating space in the interview room for all members to attend meetings, including children.

CCCIL uses a recently acquired data management system that goes beyond the traditional requirements. Additional fields include the status of the consumer's health care and other social and economic conditions that influence health. The new data management system allows consumers to designate their sexual identity. CCCIL also reviews research reports from other organizations to stay informed of evidence-based/evidence-informed practices. Data are a vital component of CCCIL's decision-making structure and used to guide the organization's future directions.

## **Progress Made in Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence**

The community is our office. ~ **Elsa Quezada, Executive Director**

Noting the limitations of transportation in rural areas and the digital divide, CCCIL staff do not wait for their consumers to come to them. They make a special effort to take their services to the consumer in the community, meeting them in libraries and other safe places. This is also vital to reach the homeless population in their service area, which has been increasing. The staff also attend community festivals, fairs, and meetings of other coalitions.

CCCIL has found that there is no one way to conduct outreach. Effective outreach works best as a combination of strategies. For example, limiting information dissemination to paper formats, such as flyers and brochures, may not be useful because in some instances consumers might be illiterate. They recommend that CILs have a willingness and openness to try other outreach techniques. One way to learn about innovative strategies for outreach is to survey the consumers. CCCIL has learned about meetings and events for disability-specific organizations, such as the MS Quality of Life Project and those working with senior citizens, simply by asking for recommendations from their consumers. They also participate with organizations that are not disability specific, such as the Non-Profit Alliance for Monterey County and the Collaborative Center for Community Advocacy, which works mostly with Latino families primarily employed as agricultural workers. Partnerships with organizations not working in disability-related fields allow CCCIL to add the disability cultural perspective to the work of these agencies.

CCCIL views outreach as the first contact and so it is vital to be welcoming, respectful, and nonjudgmental. Time must be spent building a partnership with the consumer. CCCIL wants the consumer to experience the organization as one that wants to work with them and genuinely cares,

whether in-person or on the phone. They avoid the traditional quick path of immediately writing up the intake and making the plan. They have found that sometimes it takes several meetings to explain the organizational culture to consumers—that it is inclusive, values working in partnership with them, and does not just do the work for them.

The staff at CCCIL are bilingual, and so they do not often need interpreter services. A recent agency equipment purchase translates the words that consumers type into their own language for caseworkers. They also have a partnership with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services and the Blind and Visually Impaired Agency for consumers needing those services.

CCCIL relies heavily on their partnerships to help them meet the needs of diverse communities for which they do not have representation on their staff. For example, in South Monterey County, there is a large indigenous population. CCCIL partners with the specific organizations which have a history of established trusted relationships with this community. These partnerships not only provide translation services, they teach CCCIL staff the appropriate way to adapt services so that they are culturally competent, including an understanding of how the family structure operates.

## **Efforts in Local and National Work to Improve Diversity and Cultural Competence**

The CIL requirement of developing cultural and linguistic competency standards was initiated at CCCIL. The annual work plan template for including cultural and linguistic strategies was written by CCCIL's Executive Director.

CCCIL also works with coalitions that are focused on racial/ethnic inequities and issues that are not disability specific, such as United Way. Through their participation in these coalitions, CCCIL ensures that disability-culture is considered, especially how it is perceived and addressed.

## **New Directions for Cultural Competency and Diversity**

CCCIL has just started to use their new data management system. It is anticipated that this new strategy will provide a more in-depth view of the return on investment and the effectiveness of their services. In the future, CCCIL plans to widen the scope of services delivered. Data will be collected to identify disparities and service gaps for racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse populations.

CCCIL also recommends that the independent living field increases the involvement of the next generation. This is especially important given the current climate for people with disabilities who are experiencing loss of rights in federal legislation as well as continued abuse in different settings. Engaged young people will develop leadership skills and understand that their involvement is required to maintain the hard-fought rights acquired through the disability movement.

## **Closing Comments**

CCCIL has a history of working on cultural and linguistic competence in the CIL field. CCCIL has been proactive in developing annual work plan requirements of these topics. They conduct much of their work in the community and understand that services cannot be confined to an office if the goal is to reach and meet the needs of diverse populations. CCCIL acknowledges the importance of data-based decision making for effective service delivery and has directed resources toward building capacity in that area with the acquisition of their new data management system.



# Central Iowa Center for Independent Living (Des Moines, IA) (CICIL)

*Relocating to Serve Diverse Communities*

Going into a community with a ‘helping hands strikes again’ perspective oftentimes does more harm than good.... You have to go in with humility and the expectation that you will have to ask the community you're trying to help for help yourself.

~ **Reyma McCoy McDeid, Executive Director**

## Organizational Description and Capacity for Diversity, Intersectionality and Cultural Competence

The Central Iowa Center for Independent Living (CICIL) is located in north-central Des Moines, where they recently moved to be in the most diverse part of Iowa. This relocation was a significant move purposely made because CICIL found that racially and ethnically diverse individuals with disabilities were not receiving needed services and had poorer outcomes in comparison to their Caucasian peers. For example, a disproportionate number of people of color with disabilities are homeless or incarcerated in Iowa. People of color now make their way to CICIL because of its new location, and the service-recipient demographics are much more diverse because of it. CICIL’s service area includes the seven counties of Boone, Dallas, Jasper, Marion, Polk, Story, and Warren. Racial/ethnic demographics are included in the table below for the service area, consumers, staff, and board.

### Demographics

<b>Diverse Groups: U.S. Census Categories</b>	<b>CICIL’s Community (%)* (n = 801,771)</b>	<b>CICIL’s Consumers (%) (n = 101)</b>	<b>CICIL’s Staff (%) (n = 3)</b>	<b>CICIL’s Board (%) (n = 7)</b>
Caucasian/White	78.3 - 94.6	48.0	66.0	43.0
African American/Black	< 1.0 - 6.8	46.0	33.0	29.0
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	1.9 - 8.2	1.0		14.0
Native American/Alaskan Native	< 1.0			
Asian/Pacific Islander	< 1.0 - 8.2	1.0		14.0
Other Race	< 1.0			
Two or More Races	1.1 - 2.3	4.0		

\* If applicable, community demographics represent a range of percentages. Data were gathered from the U.S. Census for individuals residing in Boone, Dallas, Jasper, Marion, Polk, Story and Warren.

At CICIL, cultural competence is viewed as a way of thinking. It is meeting the needs of the whole individual with regards to every identity that resonates with them. Cultural and linguistic competence is

not a subject line on the meeting agenda or removed into a vacuum. The organization is nonreligious and nonpartisan; thus, their view of diversity embraces everyone regardless of political views or religious affiliations.

Like all centers for independent living (CILs), CICIL has specific policies regarding antidiscrimination. On the procedural level, the organization goes a step above and seeks to be culturally competent and non-offensive in its service delivery. CICIL's guidelines describe what it means to be culturally competent and staff are expected to conduct services accordingly.

Data collected by CICIL reveal that a majority of its consumers are from racially, culturally, or linguistically diverse populations. This is due in part to an influx of racial minorities, such as African Americans who relocated to central Iowa after Hurricane Katrina. There has also been an increase in Des Moines' immigrant population, including refugees from Sudan, Somalia, Laos, and several other countries. Two major minority-serving partner organizations, Creative Visions and Urban Dreams, consistently refer their consumers who have disabilities to CICIL.

## **Progress Made in Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence**

Human services are about taking down barriers so that we can be helpful to the people who are meant to be served. If you are inadvertently putting up a barrier between yourself and the person you're supposed to be supporting, that's a bit of a problem.

~ **Reyma McCoy McDeid, Executive Director**

CICIL's team members have an open and honest relationship. Whenever staff members experience challenges in providing services, they can discuss problems and brainstorm solutions with their colleagues, resulting in improved services. The team meets on a weekly basis. A good portion of the meeting is about identifying and working through challenges that are occurring with consumers. The importance of relationship-building is paramount to providing culturally and linguistically competent services.

Staff have taken several steps to make and keep the organization consumer-directed and representative of the demographics of the service area. First, staff reached out to diverse communities so that they became aware of CICIL's existence. Second, the organization moved to its current location in a diverse community. Third, staff actively participated with other organizations and promoted CICIL's mission, vision, and values.

CICIL's transition internship program for high school students with disabilities was a unique program in Des Moines that brought a diverse population of individuals to the table. This was not initially the case. In the middle of the application period, staff members analyzed its pool of applicants and found

that the diversity of the community was not represented. To address this disparity, targeted recruitment efforts were made to ensure that transition-aged students of color were also aware of the program and able to apply. This example shows how CICIL keeps its eye on its marketing outcomes and data to ensure that all efforts are inclusive and reaching the target audience.

Every few years, Iowa's Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) administers a survey at the consumer level. CICIL also checks in with consumers on a regular basis through both interviews and brief inquiries. They ask, "How are you feeling here? How are the services you're receiving? Are you satisfied?" Feedback consistently indicates that CICIL is able to see and serve the whole person.

## **Efforts in Local and National Work to Improve Diversity and Cultural Competence**

CICIL's executive director is a member of the NAACP, Asian and Latino coalitions, and other minority-serving organizations. Attending regular meetings and discussing issues that impact individuals with disabilities is purposefully done. This approach is innovative because now there are open dialogues and conversations about disabilities in those diverse communities that did not occur prior to CICIL's involvement. The organization has found that each cultural group has its own perspective regarding disabilities and it is important for service providers to understand and embrace these different viewpoints. For instance, CICIL has found that many diverse groups view their racial/cultural/linguistic identities, rather than their disabilities, as the primary factor in their identity and/or cause of barriers to independent living.

In another initiative, CICIL has spearheaded conversations around the "preschool to prison" pipeline that has developed in many communities of color. For example, research shows that children of color face harsher interpretations and consequences for their actions that are misconstrued as misconduct and handled punitively. However, these behaviors could allude to a disability and should be handled much more supportively. For instance, a child may misbehave because he/she cannot see clearly in the classroom. Rather than being punished, the behavior should be investigated, the visual impairment identified, and glasses provided. These discussions have also highlighted the disparity of diagnoses that exists amongst populations of color, with particular regard to "invisible" disabilities and how that inadvertently places children of color at risk for negative outcomes. Given Iowa's extremely high incarceration rate for people of color and their overall low numbers in the general population, this is proving to be an effective means of engaging diverse communities in discussions about disabilities.

## **New Directions for Cultural Competency and Diversity**

At CICIL, enhancing the diversity of the seven-member board of directors is still a work in progress and the executive director was actively recruiting at the time of the study. Board members receive training on the issues of diversity annually and throughout the year during regular meetings.

CICIL's move to its location within a more diverse community was initially met with resistance from stakeholders who believed that safety and consumer numbers would be negatively impacted. Although

some long-standing consumers chose not to come to the new location, numbers have shown that the organization has benefited significantly with an influx of new consumers. It is encouraging to note that these new service recipients are diverse and in need of CICIL's unique services.

## **Closing Comments**

Compared to some other CILs, the organization is small in staff and budget. However, this does not impact its delivery of culturally competent services. CICIL emphasizes humility in the work of serving in a linguistically and culturally competent manner. This organization purports that as service providers, the best approach is to go in with the understanding that we need to first learn from the communities that we are attempting to serve.



CID-NY

# Center for Independence of the Disabled in New York (Manhattan) (CIDNY)

*Using Community Mapping and Data Mining to Target Efforts in  
Diverse Communities*

We believe our mission includes a mandate to remove barriers that are embedded in law, policy, structure, and practice; and it is these barriers that result in disparities for people with disabilities, which are much more extreme depending on your race and ethnicity. ~ Susan Dooha, Executive Director

## **Organizational Description and Capacity for Diversity, Intersectionality and Cultural Competence**

CIDNY is a nonprofit organization founded in 1978 that seeks to include and reflect the service recipient communities. CIDNY strives to serve people of all races, ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations in an *equally effective* way. The organization is very clear about valuing diversity, including staff behavioral expectations, and articulated policies that reflect the board of directors' and organization's expectations. Clear statements on affirmatively engaging people of all races and ethnicities, genders, and sexual orientations are included in CIDNY's staff handbook, governance, consumer rights, language assistance, board selection, direct services, and outreach and volunteer policies. There are also training manuals and documented work strategies for working with racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse communities.

Most of CIDNY's staff are bicultural and bilingual. People with disabilities comprise sixty-three percent of CIDNY's staff. Fifty-three percent speak at least two languages; together they speak 23 different languages, including: Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Haitian Creole, Russian, Spanish, and Urdu. Individual staff members are also proficient in American Sign Language. CIDNY's employees, most of whom are people of color, represent the diversity of New York City where they serve. Racial/ethnic demographics are included in the table on the following page for the service area, consumers, staff, and board. The staff percentages represent all the staff at CIDNY and the numbers for consumers are for those with a Consumer Service Record (CSR).

Staff are expected to be inclusive, collaborative, and respectful at CIDNY. People who come to the center for assistance are advised of this organizational-cultural expectation. It is posted on the walls, provided in materials, and included in discussions to ensure everyone knows they have a right to receive services in a nondiscriminatory, respectful manner that values and responds to their identities.

CIDNY sees itself as a civil rights organization whose work is to remove barriers to education, employment, housing, health, transportation, and other dimensions of life. To accomplish this, CIDNY talks to people with disabilities working with the organization, researches through its records to identify people who have had experience with an issue and engages its advocacy network. Staff use their own experiences as individuals with disabilities and conduct “on-the-street” surveys. CIDNY works with its university partners to identify and explore barriers experienced by people with disabilities and the inequities that these barriers produce. CIDNY identifies key indicators, issues, barriers, challenges, and opportunities for creating change, and makes recommendations to policy-makers and educates the public.

## Demographics

<b>Diverse Groups: U.S. Census Categories</b>	<b>CIDNY’s Community (%)* (n = 8,491,079)</b>	<b>CIDNY’s Consumers (%) (n = 1,629)</b>	<b>CIDNY’s Staff (%) (n = 76)</b>	<b>CIDNY’s Board (%) (n = 5)</b>
Caucasian/White	32.1	21.2	31.6	66.7
African American/Black	22.0	30.6	31.6	20.0
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	29.1	26.5	23.7	
Native American/Alaskan Native	< 1.0	< 1.0		
Asian/Pacific Islander	14.0	14.1	13.2	13.3
Other Race	< 1.0			
Two or More Races	1.9	3.1		
Race Unknown		3.9		

\*Data were obtained for individuals residing in New York City, NY from <http://www.city-data.com/city/New-York-New-York.html>

## Progress Made in Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence

We listen. We do a lot of listening. We’re learning and growing and dealing with our assumptions. Every time we meet with an individual we are listening for what are the goals that they have, what are the barriers they are experiencing. This is especially relevant to how we (as an organization) select goals.

~ Susan Dooha, Executive Director

CIDNY’s work is data-based, strategic, and targeted to address the specific issues that are impacting each community. To prepare for this work, CIDNY has the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability conduct community mapping and data-mining for each county of the state. In addition, New York City utilizes information from the American Community Survey and Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance system. They work with that data recognizing that there are some limitations. The data-mining is designed to answer questions about people with disabilities including: Who are individuals with disabilities? How are they living in terms of education, employment, poverty, median income,

health, housing, transportation, and family life? What are the barriers, disparities, and inequities that they are experiencing? Which areas have greater inequities to help CIDNY target outreach and resources?

CIDNY also utilizes additional consultant services to sort the data by neighborhood and zip code so they can identify the locations where individuals with disabilities are concentrated, and those experiencing higher rates of poverty. This is critical because poverty is a key issue for individuals who are Black and Latino/Latina in New York. Google Maps® is also utilized by CIDNY to examine whether the organization is reaching its target; that is, whether it is serving those groups with the greatest barriers and challenges to achieving their desired outcomes. CIDNY also uses mapping data to identify those areas where they need to establish organizational partnerships, (such as in the Literacy Zones and settlement houses), to best meet the needs of specific communities. Data from the mapping processes ensures that CIDNY's community outreach is actionable and focused on addressing underserved, and racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse communities.

Staff do not wait for the community to come to them. Instead they go directly to diverse communities to conduct outreach and provide services. For example, Bengali- and Urdu-speaking staff provide counseling at organizations specifically reaching South-Asian individuals with disabilities. CIDNY has developed a partnership with Literacy Zones in Harlem and in Queens who serve low-income populations who are predominately African-American and Latino. The organization provides presentations on public benefits in English and in Spanish at sites where families regularly come for assistance on other issues. Therefore, individuals do not have to come to the offices to receive services. Understanding that outreach is most effective and trusted when it is done in the community's voice, CIDNY utilizes culture-specific media, such as Spanish language television. It also promotes its services in community-based newspapers.

Specific studies are conducted to determine strategies for meeting community needs. For example, based on the data, CIDNY determined there was not a strong and lengthy history of independent living services for Asian-Americans in New York. Therefore, they decided to place special emphasis on rectifying this issue. They conducted focus groups, case reviews, and key informant interviews with people in the Chinese-American community to determine the barriers and facilitators that impacted their access to IL and vocational rehabilitation services. Research findings indicated that people want to work with language competent staff, have materials translated, work with knowledgeable counselors placed at familiar organizations, and get help navigating complex government programs.

These findings inform CIDNY's continued outreach and services to this community. For example, Chinese-speaking staff work in Chinatown at community-based organizations where English is a second language and where cultural norms may prevent people from seeking assistance at a site not known to their community. The staff regularly provide benefit-eligibility assessments for people who do not want to go outside of Chinatown for services and who feel more comfortable talking about their issues in a familiar place. CIDNY also translates its materials into languages other than English.

In addition to community perspectives, CIDNY's staff and board members are required to bring their experiences and understanding of issues to the planning and continuous quality improvement

processes. During monthly meetings, the ethnically and racially diverse staff, including members of the LGBTQ community, report on the following.

- What are the experiences people are having in the field?
- What are the issues they are confronting?
- What does CIDNY need to do to resolve these issues?
- What are the strategies that need to be employed?

Information from these monthly discussions with staff helps CIDNY set goals and target both internal and external action.

CIDNY also conducts town hall meetings and listening sessions to increase opportunities for learning. They participate in community coalitions focused on general community topics, such as health care or housing, where they introduce issues important to people with disabilities. CIDNY's participation in these coalitions contributes to their efforts to gain allies and supporters and to create an inclusive community where people with disabilities are welcomed. For example, CIDNY is a steering committee member of the Health Care for All New York. This coalition, which focuses on health-coverage advocacy, is comprised of organizations that represent diverse groups, including racial/ethnic and LGBTQ communities, newcomers, women, and people who speak a primary language other than English. CIDNY also works with the New York Immigration Coalition and Make the Road by Walking, two agencies working to protect the rights of immigrant communities.

With a focus on eliminating barriers, CIDNY developed the report, *The ADA at 25: Many Bridges to Cross*. This document provides the results of a study that examined the experiences of people with disabilities, including the patterns of segregation and exclusion they experienced, depending on their type of disability and race/ethnicity. Findings from the study revealed that Black and Latino/Latina populations had significantly worse outcomes at every level of educational attainment in New York. This information is used to inform CIDNY's work.

As a center for independent living (CIL), unaffordable and inaccessible housing and a high rate of homelessness are key issues for people with disabilities who come to CIDNY. Therefore, CIDNY uses data to examine rent-burden and housing insecurity for populations, as well as the likelihood of homelessness. Examination of these data by race/ethnicity and type of disability contributed to reaching a settlement agreement with New York City to remove barriers to full integration and access to services in shelters.

Benefits advisement is an essential service at CIDNY because people with disabilities in New York who are Black or Latino are disproportionately likely to be poor and to need resources from public-benefits systems. They are more likely to need help to obtain and navigate public housing, Medicaid, food stamps, and transportation. With benefits advisement, CIDNY helps to make sure that individuals have the resources available to reach their life goals.

## **Efforts in National Work to Improve Diversity and Cultural Competence**

The Peer Advocacy Program, a recent initiative at CIDNY, was organized to confront the impact of proposed health reform at the federal level, particularly regarding the proposed reductions in funding and transformation of Medicaid into a block grant or a program with per capita caps. This is important because Medicaid is the primary source of healthcare for people with disabilities in New York City. Advocates learn to speak out at town hall meetings; demonstrate; set up phone, email, and Twitter campaigns; and do outreach. CIDNY also participates in demonstrations about immigration, and a work-group on police response to people with disabilities.

## **New Directions for Cultural Competency and Diversity**

Regarding next steps, CIDNY is planning to create a new class of peer advocates and intensify the Peer Advocacy Program, which was started last year. Future training topics for the program will include learning how to do advocacy writing, conduct civil disobedience, and use media and social media to create change. Peers reflect the population groups CIDNY targets, including African American, Hispanic or Latino, and Asian and Southeast Asian communities.

CIDNY's transition work in public schools is a priority and is designed to go beyond just knowing how to participate in an individualized education plan (IEP) and how to complete college applications. Recognizing that there were instances when Spanish-speaking families were unable to participate in IEPs because interpreter or translation services were not available and noting inequitable or severe disciplinary measures for students of color, CIDNY saw the importance of helping Black and Latino/Latina youth and their families know their rights and build self-advocacy skills. For example, Spanish-speaking family members of children with disabilities told CIDNY that they did not know they had the right to have an interpreter for school meetings regarding their youth's IEP or translated materials. CIDNY then did a training on the rights of parents of youth with disabilities and helped parents learn self-advocacy strategies, including writing request letters for necessary accommodations. In cases where the school refused to cooperate, CIDNY, at the parents' request, advised the school of their responsibilities and won interpreters for those families when they met with teachers and administrative personnel. In other cases, youth with disabilities learned that they had the right to participate in general school activities. At one particular school, youth requested and earned the right to go on school trips when they had previously been told by the school's administration that they could not attend because of their disability. Students also learned to speak for themselves and worked with CIDNY to create a video about their experiences in learning their rights.

Future efforts are also in progress to expand translation services ensuring that **all** materials are available in the needed languages and that there is information in Arabic. Currently, materials are available in Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Haitian-Creole, and Korean.

## **Closing Comments**

CIDNY uses data to better understand how it is impacting underserved and underrepresented groups. This is key to CIDNY's process for determining goals and the effectiveness of its efforts. Information from the American Community Survey, the service population, staff, and mapping methodologies help to ensure that the organization's initiatives are relevant to removing barriers for all and especially those most negatively impacted by them. Participation in coalitions and utilization of culture-specific networks expands efforts beyond the disability community and builds relationships and new allies. Through an eagle-eyed focus on civil rights, CIDNY addresses the needs of different communities, making sure that they know their rights and can advocate for themselves. CIDNY's approach to serving various groups involves being present in the community and having people on staff that represent their service-recipient populations. CIDNY speaks out on issues that disproportionately impact groups with a constant orientation to diversity in the way they work.



# Community Resources for Independent Living (Hayward, CA)

*Empowered Youth Engage Diverse Peers in Schools*

Don't always take a strong stance on your own beliefs. Be open to someone else's beliefs and what they've gone through.... Be open to what they have to say and see how (you) can help them. ~ **Ron Halog, Executive Director**

## Organizational Description and Capacity for Diversity, Intersectionality and Cultural Competence

Community Resources for Independent Living (CRIL) is a peer-based disability resource organization that advocates and provides resources for people with disabilities to improve lives and make communities fully accessible. The organization’s commitment to cultural competence is evident in the diversity of its staff, board of directors, and advisory committee. The core values espoused by CRIL—to promote equality, appreciate diversity, and treat people with dignity and respect, creates a welcoming culture for all people, including those from diverse groups. Eighty-eight percent of CRIL’s consumers reside in Alameda County and the other 12% come from across the state of California. Racial/ethnic demographics are included in the table below for the primary service area (Alameda County), consumers, staff, and board.

### Demographics

Diverse Groups: U.S. Census Categories	CRIL’s Community (%) (n =1,647,704)	CRIL’s Consumers (%) (n = 781)	CRIL’s Staff (%) (n = 10)	CRIL’s Board (%) (n = 7)
Caucasian/White alone	32.1	33.0	20.0	57.0
African American/Black alone	11.6	26.0	20.0	14.0
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	22.5	23.0	20.0	
American Indian/Alaskan Native alone	1.1	1.0		
Asian alone	30.2	15.0	10.0	14.0
Other Race	1.0		30.0	14.0
Two or More Races	5.3	2.0		
Unknown		2.0		

Data were gathered from the U.S. Census for individuals residing in Alameda County, CA.

The organizational culture is very much driven by its service population. CRIL seeks to be responsive to its consumers’ needs and communicate in their language. For example, Fremont, part of CRIL’s

service area, has the second largest population of Afghan immigrants in the U.S. However, staff lacked the linguistic competence to serve this group, so CRIL filled this need by hiring someone who speaks Farsi. This staff member has opened many doors to their entire community.

Cultural competence and acceptance is imbedded in everything that CRIL does. At staff meetings, team members share their best practices on how to approach and communicate with specific ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse groups to which they belong. Thus, they serve as cross-trainers to one another, informing their colleagues on what is appropriate and respectful for interactions in specific communities and other topics of significance.

## **Progress Made in Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence**

Instead of having people go to us, we've started to go to them. We need to go to shelters, we need to go on the street and meet them there. People need to go out and meet the people and find out what's going on in their own community.... If you really want to make an impact go out to the community, find out who is out there and find out the community you want to work with. ~ **Ron Halog, Executive Director**

CRIL visits high school students in their sophomore and junior years to inform them about the center for independent living (CIL) and its services. They are accompanied by the DANY group (Disability Action Network for Youth), which is an ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse group of 16- to 28-year-old youth and young adults with disabilities. When youth in schools meet the members of DANY, they see an empowered group who are ready and able to advocate around matters of independence. Many of the high school students with disabilities feel like they are not accepted, especially when they come from a diverse community. Seeing the members of DANY has been very impactful because it puts a face to the empowerment of youth with disabilities.

Recognizing that the silo mentality is not effective, staff members are out in the community and are just as likely to recruit consumers at partner events as they are to engage them on the streets or in homeless shelters. There is a similar approach to identifying and working with partner organizations. CRIL participates in approximately 50 outreach events every year through their collaborative relationships. Their partnership events are as diverse as hosting flu shot clinics with local hospitals, to attending street fairs, and outreach efforts for seniors.

To meet the needs of the diverse population in its locale, CRIL staff attend events with brochures in all its available languages. If an audience primarily speaks a certain language, then the assigned attending staff will include at least one person who speaks that language.

CRIL has reciprocal relationships with Deaf Plus, Lighthouse for the Blind, Asian Community Mental Health, LaFamilia, Friends with Special Needs, and other minority-serving groups. These organizations help CRIL fulfill language-interpretation access requirements and/or expand their reach. CRIL, in turn, advises them on how to provide services that are appropriate and accessible for individuals with disabilities.

## **Efforts in Local and National Work to Improve Diversity and Cultural Competence**

Until 2015, individuals with disabilities receiving federal benefits were limited in the amount of money they could save, essentially relegating them to a life of poverty. The Stephen Beck Jr. Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, removed this saving threshold and allows individuals with disabilities to open tax-free savings accounts (up to \$100,000) without the threat of losing government-assistance. CRIL coordinated and participated in the California ABLE Board presentations to 17 organizations. These presentations were planned to be conducted only in English until CRIL advocated for and prepared the information in multiple languages.

DANY traveled to Sacramento and spoke with legislators about their experiences as youth with disabilities from racially/ethnically/linguistically diverse groups. For the first time they were able to discuss issues with policy makers. They also talked to legislators about their concerns with the new immigration laws. This advocacy helped them see how they can make a difference. Changing paradigms is not coming from the top-down but from the community-up.

Additionally, DANY participated in a recent *Get Out and Vote* campaign. The group set a goal of a 6% increase in voter registration. They organized phone banking, provided interpreters, and held forums in which individuals could learn about the voting process and become familiar with the devices. There was across-the-board attendance from diverse groups, including over 3,000 seniors and people with disabilities. As a result of DANY's *Get Out and Vote* campaign efforts, the 6% goal was met. They will be gearing up to participate in another campaign soon.

CRIL participates on the Lanterman Coalition, which is comprised of over 50 statewide organizations. The coalition meets monthly to talk about issues at the state and federal levels, such as healthcare and immigration law. The coalition has sent helpful information to individuals about resources and procedures for obtaining citizenship.

## **New Directions for Cultural Competency and Diversity**

Regarding next steps, plans are being made to expand upon a unique and successful approach to this year's Disability Capital Action Day (DCAD). This event offers an opportunity for different communities and disability service organizations to go to the capital, participate in a rally, and visit their legislators. In prior years, CRIL would always take their Spanish-speaking peer support group to communicate with the legislators on behalf of the group. This time they requested bilingual meetings (in English and Spanish) with legislators so that they could hear the concerns and comments directly from the community members in their native language. Many more people want to join this peer support group now through word of mouth. Preparations are underway to include a Farsi-speaking contingent in the next DCAD.

## **Closing Comments**

At CRIL, the commitment to diversity is seen, not in lengthy policies or documents, but in the diversity of its staff, board of directors, and advisory committee. Additional strength comes from its extensive network of peer supporters and community-based partners. This wealth of human capital allows the organization to effectively meet the needs of its consumer population who are racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse.



# disABILITY LINK (Atlanta, GA)

*Training Peers to Provide Culturally-Competent Support Services*

Our purpose and mission are simply to maintain or increase independence for people with disabilities. ~ **Kim Gibson, Executive Director**

## **Organizational Description and Capacity for Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence**

At disABILITY LINK, diversity is considered a part of its DNA. The disability community is highly diverse, reflecting the greater community, because disability impacts everyone—regardless of other characteristics. This inclusive approach is embraced by its board of directors and staff. Diversity is included in training for new members. Although the mission does not explicitly address racial, ethnic, or linguistic diversity, organizational policies stress nondiscrimination based on categories that include race, ethnicity, gender identity, religious beliefs, and cross-disability.

The organization serves Metropolitan Atlanta, which is classified as the 10 counties of: Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, and Rockdale. The Atlanta region includes suburban, urban, and rural communities. disABILITY LINK undertakes extensive in-person and virtual outreach to a total of 12 counties (1/2 the population of GA) throughout the region. The purpose is to develop collaborations and invite a diverse group of people to participate in their programs and services. Clarkston, one of the cities served, is recognized as one of the most diverse in the nation. disABILITY LINK also provides services to towns that are refugee entry points.

Racial/ethnic demographics are included in the following table for the service area of Metropolitan Atlanta, consumers, staff, and board. The percentages of the consumers are closely reflected in the composition of disABILITY LINK's staff and board members. Brochures and other promotional materials highlight this diversity and convey the message that the organization is a safe place where everyone is welcomed.

Accessibility is ensured through a variety of resources including on-demand interpreters, staff members who can provide basic sign language, and Ubiduo® communications software. The front-door greeting meets the needs of those who are visually impaired, while iPods allow consumers to listen to pertinent messages. An Access Video Interpreting app and video conferencing with caption capabilities have recently been added. In addition, disABILITY LINK supports the removal of barriers and inclusion of people with all types of characteristics through workshops to organizations in the community, consumers, and staff.

## Demographics

Diverse Groups: U.S. Census Categories	disABILITY LINK's Community (%)* (n = 4,505,067)	disABILITY LINK's Consumers (%) (n = 569)	disABILITY LINK's Staff (%) (n = 23)	disABILITY LINK's Board (%) (n = 9)
Caucasian/White	10.8 - 63.5	22.0	35.7	33.0
African American/Black	23.0 - 71.0	70.0	52.0	55.5
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	7.1 - 20.8	2.5	4.4	4.4
Native American/Alaskan Native	0.3 - 0.8	1.1	3.5	
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.7 - 11.9	1.2	4.4	
Other Race	0.1	2.2		2.7
Two or More Races	2.1 - 2.7	1.0		4.4

\* If applicable, community demographics represent a range of percentages.

Data were gathered from the U.S. Census for individuals residing in the 10 counties of Metropolitan Atlanta (Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, and Rockdale)

The welcoming atmosphere is created through purposeful planning and intentional messaging. This starts from the time an individual comes within 10 feet of the door and hears the verbal greeting, “Welcome to disABILITY LINK.” The hallways underscore a focus on advocacy, displaying messages such as, “*Black lives matter, women's rights are human rights, love is love, and kindness is everything.*” In addition, posters are purposely displayed to present a diverse range of individuals who represent the independent living movement. Each of these touches is designed to resonate with different individuals and make each person feel at home.

To further support this inclusivity, ongoing training is provided on the rights of people with disabilities and best practices for working with diverse cultures. Sessions occur intentionally for new staff and board members, at monthly meetings, and at weekly Friday meetings when support groups are discussed. disABILITY LINK also provides training at various universities and colleges that serve ethnically diverse people with disabilities, such as Morehouse and Spelman.

## Progress Made in Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence

One of the major practices here is the inclusion of all people that starts at the front of the door to say “is it inviting to all?”

~ **Kim Gibson, Executive Director**

disABILITY LINK is well known for the number and variety of programs it offers. This is due in part to its location in the diverse Atlanta area, but is primarily due to its open-door policy through which staff, board members, and consumers can address issues they are passionate about. These issues often become the focus of peer-led groups, such as the LGBTQ + disABILITY Peer Support Group, men’s

and women’s groups for survivors of domestic violence, peer support groups for people with mental health disabilities, and groups focused on young adults. The variety of groups and programs allows individuals to obtain supports in the way they find most comfortable. There is no such thing as “one size fits all” in independent living. disABILITY LINK recognizes the need to support each consumer in a unique manner that addresses the person’s individual needs and personal goals. One of the tenets of independent living is that we are each the expert in our own lives. What works for one person does not necessarily work for another. Consequently, programs and services are highly individualized, addressing all aspects of a person’s life, including those that are not simply the disability label or experience.

The organization also places a strong emphasis on peer support for individuals achieving their goals of transitioning from nursing homes to independent living or from high school to college. Peer Support Certification trainings are conducted to ensure that a high level of support is provided. The peer-support training curriculum addresses cultural differences and supporting peers in culturally competent ways. Peer support is the basis of independent living; it does not simply mean working alongside someone who has the same or similar disability label. Instead, it means sharing experiences and exploring consequences with a peer who supports the person in their own goals and decision-making. Another class called *Nothing About Us Without Us*, is geared towards education advocacy. Collaborations are part of the organizational culture and include Black Lives Matter groups, the NAACP, Martin Luther King (MLK) Center, and groups within the Latino, Korean, Muslim, and Jewish communities. Consumers also benefit from collaborations with refugee and second-language groups.

disABILITY LINK collects information through outcome surveys, its webpage, and comments gleaned at the end of sponsored-sessions. Evaluation data are used to identify gaps in service and to meet consumer needs on various topics such as voting, housing discrimination, and transportation. disABILITY LINK has the goal of eliminating or at least overcoming any barriers for its consumers. For example, to overcome the transportation barrier, major events are held near train stations, rather than at the main office where attendees would have to take both a train and bus.

## **Efforts in Local and National Work to Improve Diversity and Cultural Competence**

disABILITY LINK talks the talk and literally walks the walk on issues of advocacy and peer support. It spearheaded a Martin Luther King Junior Parade and Disability Day, and is still very active with this event. The organization also participates in social justice events in Washington, DC, and locally, including Black Lives Matter marches and LGBTQ PRIDE Days. Staff and board members also educate and engage policymakers and elected officials in a variety of ways. Efforts to empower and register individuals to “get out and vote” are conducted in tandem with this work.

In 2016, disABILITY LINK was named one of the nation’s top 20 experts on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This designation is one indication of the commitment that disABILITY LINK

makes to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life. These local and national efforts highlight the organization's commitment to inclusivity and cultural competence.

## **New Directions for Cultural Competency and Diversity**

The organization constantly asks the question, "Are we representing the groups that are majority in this area?" In many cases, the answer is yes. However, data have revealed that there are groups that could be better served. These include the Spanish-speaking community and veterans. The organization is investigating how these groups might be better served.

## **Closing Comments**

disABILITY LINK has demonstrated a clear commitment to cultural competence. From its board to its staff and consumers, all facets reflect the diversity of the Atlanta area. The organization has been well served by policies that encourage everyone to enter its doors and bring their voices to the table. This has resulted in advocacy building, including voter registration drives and social-justice activities such as Black Lives Matter marches, and peer-support linkages that increase successful outcomes for consumers. Ongoing training and intentional inclusivity are the foundations upon which the organization can continue its mission to maintain or increase independence for people with disabilities.

IICIL



# Illinois Iowa Center for Independent Living (Illinois/Iowa) (IICIL)

*Utilizing a Team Approach to Ensure Diverse Perspectives in Decision-Making*

If you are truly wanting to address diversity, linguistics, and competence, then you need to have it as part of the fabric of your organization. It needs to be part of your strategic planning and everything that you're doing. ~ **Liz Sherwin, Executive Director**

## Organizational Description and Capacity for Diversity, Intersectionality and Cultural Competence

Nestled in an area covering two states and four principal cities along the Mississippi River, the Illinois Iowa Center for Independent Living (IICIL) serves a diverse constituency, where Spanish-speaking persons are the largest racial/ethnic population. There are over 90 African dialects that are spoken by immigrants in this region. IICIL’s service area includes the six counties of: Clinton, IA; Henry, IL; Mercer, IL; Muscatine, IA; Rock Island, IL; and Scott, IA. Racial/ethnic demographics are included in the table below for the service area, consumers, staff, and board.

### Demographics

Diverse Groups: U.S. Census Categories	IICIL’s Community (%)* (n = 443,010)	IICIL’s Consumers (%) (n = 472)	IICIL’s Staff (%) (n = 8)	IICIL’s Board (%) (n = 11)
Caucasian/White	72.5 - 95.6	80.5	50.0	45.5
African American/Black	< 1.0 - 10.4	15.0	37.5	54.5
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	2.3 - 17.5	4.0	12.5	
Native American/Alaskan Native	< 1.0			
Asian/Pacific Islander	< 1.0 - 2.8	< 1.0		
Other Race	< 1.0			
Two or More Races	1.0 - 3.0			

\* If applicable, community demographics represent a range of percentages.

Data were obtained from the U.S. Census for individuals residing in Clinton County, IA; Henry County, IL; Mercer County, IL; Muscatine County, IA; Rock Island County, IL; and Scott County, IA.

IICIL’s new fully accessible office building is in an African-American neighborhood and can be seen from a well-traveled state highway. This location has enhanced IICIL’s visibility and their ability to

connect with diverse communities. They have received many new referrals from inquiring visitors wanting to know about the purpose of the organization and its services.

IICIL operates with a team structure that increases and reinforces the agency's goal and commitment to diversity at every level. Staff members at IICIL are diverse. They serve on any number of the four ongoing teams of the organization. These teams are the Administration Team (AT), Direct Services Team (DST), Community Education and Advocacy Team (CEAT), and Resources and Development Team (RDT). Using this strategy, every team member, whether from administrative or staff levels, has equal authority to plan, decide on and implement initiatives, and hold one another accountable. The transition to this structure 17 years ago was not easy, particularly as middle-management positions were eliminated. However, it produced many benefits, one being a decision-making structure that includes diverse perspectives.

The AT primarily focuses on human resource tasks, such as making sure the office is open and that staff have what they need to do their jobs. This team also manages contracts, does paperwork, and develops budgets. Diverse representation on this team ensures that funds are available to cover registration fees required for participation in community events in diverse communities.

The DST handles the Consumer Service Records (CSRs) and works with consumers on a day-to-day basis. Diverse representation on this team has resulted in improved services to the Spanish-speaking community. For example, the DST member who is fluent in Spanish provides interpreter services to IICIL and other organizations. This staff member has also trained the team on how to access and serve the Spanish-speaking population to effectively address identified needs.

The CEAT reaches out to the different ethnicities in IICIL's service community and participates in events to provide information about its services. CEAT members sit on various advisory committees in counties and cities. They participate in the activities of other organizations and invite others to participate with IICIL. This team also delivers training on disability awareness to external organizations, conducts accessibility audits, and trains consumers on independent living.

The RDT secures funding by applying for grants and soliciting funding or other resources from foundations. They also produce the IICIL newsletter and create its annual reports, ensuring that it is in Spanish and disseminated to refugee populations

Board and staff trainings occur twice a year in May and October. During these required trainings, the board and staff discuss the consumer population, making sure they are aware of those with whom they have yet to connect. They also discuss strategies for improving outreach and interactions with all consumers, including those from communities who are unserved or underserved.

## **Progress Made in Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence**

The community that you serve has to feel that you are a part of them.... People know me, see me, and trust me. It's the same with the rest of our staff. Those are the kinds of things that validate us because we are part of the community and that's how we are able

to provide that level of service. ~ **Liz Sherwin, Executive Director**

Prior to the team management approach, IICIL may not have been viewed as positively as desired in the community. A forum was held where consumers, business owners, agencies, legislators, and elected officials gave feedback on what was needed to improve IICIL. The information from this data collection was used to plan and implement enhancements, including outreach to diverse communities, providing qualified sign-language interpreters, and the onboarding of Spanish-speaking staff.

The board is very invested in making sure that IICIL operates in a manner that is welcoming to everyone. Ignited by the information from the forum, the board created a grid of what was needed to make the organization more successful and representative of the community. The grid helped IICIL to recognize that its board did not include ethnic representation, which was directly related to its inability to reach and serve diverse populations. Therefore, the grid highlights attributes, such as skills and demographics that should be represented on the board and staff. The grid is used during board and staff recruitment efforts to make sure the organization is staying on target with diverse and qualified representation.

In addition to being guided by the grid-plan, IICIL benefits from a Program Strategy Team (PST), which meets annually and is comprised of board members and staff. It looks at the organization's work plan for the year to make sure that the four ongoing teams are addressing their mandates on diversity and outreach. A progress report is completed in September and if any team is not accomplishing those goals, it is charged with determining ways to do so. IICIL also utilizes a long-term strategic plan that ensures the continuity and sustainment of the organizational goals, including diversity and cultural and linguistic competence.

Teams use data from various sources including CILmanager®, census data, and the Bi-State Regional Commission. The Commission collects and analyzes data on numerous issues, including housing and transportation. It also works to approve transportation and housing planning for the metropolitan area. As a member of this Commission, IICIL's executive director uses this data as part of the organization's work plan. Through this resource, its teams can better identify populations who need support, greater access to services, or more representation in advocacy efforts.

IICIL has approximately eight support groups for individuals with vision and hearing impairments. The organization partners with elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools to provide support for students, including assistance with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). As the children get older, parents typically reestablish contact with IICIL, or the schools may invite staff members to conduct training on the transition from school to work or to independent living.

In all the communities they serve, IICIL's staff members are diligent about being full members so that they are not seen as outsiders telling the community what to do. They are viewed as members of the community because they are visible, participate in initiatives, and serve as advisory and policy board members. This makes it easier to access and serve communities. A large part of IICIL's service area is rural, and public transportation is not an option for getting to services. Therefore, IICIL makes sure that the budget allows for effective outreach and presence in those communities. Due to the lack of transportation, people are isolated from both services and socialization. The ability of staff to travel to

these locales and reach rural consumers, including people who are elderly and/or members of ethnic/diverse groups, has increased their knowledge of IICIL's services and programs.

An example of IICIL's commitment to diversity and intergenerational outreach is its membership in the Martin Luther King Center's ACTIVE Club (Aging Citizens Taking Interest in a Variety of Experiences). Through participation with this group of seniors, staff have been able to increase their Consumer Service Records (CSRs) and information and referrals to African Americans.

## **Efforts in Local and National Work to Improve Diversity and Cultural Competence**

Community involvement is an integral part of the organizational culture at IICIL. For this reason, it is visible and impactful at the local, state, and national level. Staff work with organizations that serve individuals with disabilities, the NAACP, the Martin Luther King Jr. Center, all Chambers of Commerce including the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, community and neighborhood groups, and the various Human Services Councils that serve rural communities.

Unfortunately, the area has had incidences of police shootings, and IICIL staff members have participated in forums to tackle this issue. They highlight the fact that so many of the individuals who have been shot are people with disabilities. In addition, they educate stakeholders about young people with disabilities who have not been identified and become involved in the justice system. Annually, IICIL's executive director delivers targeted presentations to two local police departments.

Advocacy work also targets issues that affect the greater community. As an example, the metropolitan areas were previously served by a public transportation system with limited hours. An advisory board was formed and the group successfully worked with the system to extend the hours of service. As another example, IICIL has joined with other organizations, including the local NAACP branch and the office of the Appellate Defender for over 10 years. Through this partnership, individuals learn how they can have their records expunged and then gain access to public housing and jobs.

## **New Directions for Cultural Competency and Diversity**

IICIL plans to continue its work even though these types of accomplishments can be time-intensive, particularly for a staff of 8 and a board of 11. This level of participation is sustained because it is interwoven into the organization and everyone has adopted it as important to their work. Staff attend approximately 30 different meetings per month, but do not view it as a burden because they connect with consumers and gain referrals, so it facilitates the work they are trying to do. Participation in the meetings keeps the staff aware of what is going on so they can be more effective. For example, as a mentor with the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL), the executive director travels to different centers for independent living and provides trainings. A CIL executive director in Georgia noted that the training was so beneficial that staff are now able to reach various populations that they were not reaching previously. In these and other ways, IICIL is impacting change and fostering diversity at the local, state, and national level.

## **Closing Comments**

At IICIL, staff are in the community and not confined to their offices. The team management structure provides a level of accountability, collegiality, and efficiency that serves them well. Diversity and outreach are intertwined throughout the organization in all its planning and implementation processes. In addition, there is a strong synergy that is created between IICIL and the community organizations to whom they give time, effort, and commitment. This in turn leads to a level of service delivery that is exemplary.





# IndependenceFirst IndependenceFirst (Milwaukee, WI)

*Utilizing Multiple Strategies to Ensure Effective Communication with Diverse Groups*

The organization's mission is focused on diversity and meeting the needs of all individuals; it is a part of who we are. ~ **Lee Schulz, President & CEO**

## **Organizational Description and Capacity for Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence**

IndependenceFirst is one of the largest centers for independent living (CIL) in the nation. It is located near the downtown area of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The organization has a strong commitment to cultural competence and to meeting the needs of individuals of all races, ethnicities, religions, genders, and sexual orientations. IndependenceFirst strives to make everyone feel welcome.

IndependenceFirst ensures a culture of inclusivity by hiring diverse staff. Staff members are expected to work cross culturally and to have an openness to working with individuals who are different from themselves. There is zero tolerance otherwise.

All new staff participate in a week-long training that includes detailed information on cultural and linguistic competence. Existing employees are kept current on matters related to cultural and linguistic competence and diversity through monthly presentations. Diverse staff bring information highlighting the strengths, needs, and uniqueness of their communities. There is also an employee assistance program available for additional training and support.

The organization serves a four-county metropolitan area with a population just under 2 million people. Although Milwaukee itself is not an identified refugee entry point, there are many immigrants who are of Russian-Jewish heritage. There is also a large and growing population of Spanish-speaking immigrants. Sixty percent of IndependenceFirst's consumers are from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse populations. Most of its staff are individuals with disabilities, including four people who are Deaf. The service area includes the four counties of Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha. Racial/ethnic demographics are included in the table on the following page for the service area, consumers, staff, and board.

To best serve consumers, all materials are printed in English, Spanish, and Russian. Some resources are also available in Hmong. IndependenceFirst's materials are made available to the national network in a spirit of camaraderie and collegiality like other CILs. The organization also uses Foreign Language Line® through AT&T, has a full-time staff member who is certified in American Sign Language, and uses the International Institute for Interpreters, as needed.

## Demographics

Diverse Groups: U.S. Census Categories	IndependenceFirst 's Community (%)* (n = 1,572,482)	IndependenceFirst 's Consumers (%) (n = 24,130)	IndependenceFirst 's Staff (%) (n = 105)	IndependenceFirst 's Board (%) (n = 20)
Caucasian/White	51.9-91.8	40.0	74.0	74.0
African American/Black	1.2-27.2	44.0	9.0	7.0
Hispanic/Latino/Lati na	2.8-14.8	10.0	9.0	7.0
Native American/ Alaskan Native	<1.0-1.0	2.0	2.0	6.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.4-4.3	1.0	2.0	6.0
Other Race	<1.0			
Two or More Races	1.1-2.7	3.0	4.0	

\* If applicable, community demographics represent a range of percentages.

Data were gathered from the U.S. Census for individuals residing in the counties of Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha

## Progress Made in Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is being able to effectively communicate with different cultures and different ethnic groups. ~ **Lee Schulz, President & CEO**

IndependenceFirst fosters connections with diverse communities by reaching out to nontraditional and culturally diverse groups and organizations. Culture-specific organizations and those targeting low-income and disenfranchised communities are encouraged to use their facility.

Cross-cultural marketing efforts have also increased the organization's presence in various communities. The marketing staff makes an effort to use the media outlets that will best reach each target population. For example, targeted advertising occurs on radio stations whose audience is primarily African American. Similarly, the media staff have placed advertisements through the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and other organizations. Every year staff look at the numbers in various categories to see if there are any groups that need to be targeted more.

The organization is currently working with 12 inner-city schools to provide training, resources, and peer support to students transitioning to independent living. There are currently three staff members working to target youth with additional staff collaborating. IndependenceFirst's work in these schools allows access to many diverse ethnic groups that previously have not been reached.

Data are primarily collected through myCIL® and a satisfaction survey that is administered to everyone who receives services. This information is used to identify underserved groups and opportunities for targeted services. For example, data has shown that the organization needs to continue its efforts to recruit veterans into its consumer base. One of the new board members is

African American and a veteran. It is hoped that his involvement will increase access to that population.

At IndependenceFirst, it is recognized and accepted that meeting the needs of diverse consumers may require extensive time and financial resources. For example, a Spanish-language translator and a sign-language interpreter for English were hired when serving a Spanish-speaking family with a child who was deaf, so that staff could communicate with the child and family members. While it was costly, this ensured effective communication and the consumer was well-served.

## **Efforts in Local and National Work to Improve Diversity and Cultural Competence**

Milwaukee, while being diverse, is considered one of the most segregated cities in the country in terms of housing. There have been periodic initiatives by IndependenceFirst and United Way to confront this issue. Staff members are also active in the Social Development Commission, an organization that provides people with the resources needed to exit a life of poverty.

## **New Directions for Cultural Competency and Diversity**

IndependenceFirst is constantly identifying areas where it can grow. Currently, most of its service provision is in urban settings. There are plans to increase services to the outlying counties that are more rural.

## **Closing Comments**

IndependenceFirst has embraced the diversity in Milwaukee and its surrounding communities. At the same time, it is working on tackling the systemic segregation that is still in place. IndependenceFirst has developed a culture of inclusivity. The management team and staff strive to be as flexible and diverse as possible. Recognizing that it takes resources to ensure cultural and linguistic competence, IndependenceFirst is committed to and undaunted by the task of making sure that consumers' needs are addressed within a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse lens.





# Metropolitan Center for Independent Living (St. Paul, MN) (MCIL)

*Working with Vocational Rehabilitation Services to Address Non-Employment Issues for Diverse Communities*

It is important that we seek to understand and have an appreciation for world views and for value systems, for how people see themselves. Doing so requires a high degree of cultural nimbleness and diplomacy and always seeking that understanding. When applying independent living philosophy, which has as its assets a deference to the aspirations of people we work with, it works in concert for us to know not only the aspirations of a person, but the culture and language context by which a person makes those aspirations known. ~ **Jesse Bethke Gomez, Executive Director**

## **Organizational Description and Capacity for Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence**

Metropolitan Center for Independent Living (MCIL) was founded in 1981. There are approximately 612,000 people with disabilities in Minnesota, with about 50% residing in the Twin Cities seven-county metropolitan area, which MCIL serves. These counties include Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington. Demographically, Minnesota is 19% African American/Black, 11% Hispanic/Latino, 5% Asian, and 2% American Indian/Alaskan Native. In the St. Paul Public School System alone, there are 92 spoken languages. With this level of diversity in the city, it is critical for human-service organizations to be culturally and linguistically competent. Racial/ethnic demographics are included in the table on the following page for the service area, consumers, staff, and board.

MCIL embraces the opportunity to serve all people with disabilities who are racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse. Staff represent the community in all job ranks, from leadership to line staff. Additionally, the organization identifies and embraces multiple ways to expand its responsiveness and reach. One of the first ways is by working with a third-party vendor to provide an array of interpreters who can support consumers at MCIL's offices or partner sites. Second, MCIL has loaned its Braille system to other service organizations, as needed. Third, the enterprise reaches out to organizations serving diverse populations, such as those in African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American communities. These efforts have all been for the goal of fully serving and supporting people with disabilities, often in partnership with other agencies.

## Demographics

Diverse Groups: US Census Categories	MCIL's Community (%)* (n = 2,985,405)	MCIL's Consumers (%) (n = 1,321)	MCIL's Staff (%) (n = 77)	MCIL's Board (%) (n = 10)
Caucasian/White alone	90.7 - 66.9	63.0	72.0	90.0
African American/Black alone	1.2 - 11.6	25.0	22.0	
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	3.4 - 7.2	2.0	1.5	10.0
American Indian /Alaskan Native alone	0.6 - 0.8	< 1		
Asian alone	2.7 - 11.6	< 1	3.0	
Other Race				
Two or More Races	1.3 - 2.8	1.0	1.5	
Unknown		5.0		

\* If applicable, community demographics represent a range of percentages.

Data were gathered from the U.S. Census for individuals residing in Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington

MCIL is mindful about working with existing agencies who also serve diverse communities. The agency believes in building mutuality of effort, so that the community itself is empowered to implement successful strategies. Central to this approach is the willingness, ability, and competence that is necessary to understand the nuances of diverse communities. The MCIL Board of Directors has an authentic and deep commitment to diversity and increasing it within the organization, including board membership. The board of directors, executive director, management team, and employees have an appreciation for the Civil Rights Movement and the inalienable rights of all people to pursue life, liberty, and happiness.

## Progress Made in Diversity, Intersectionality, and Cultural Competence

We want to deepen our agency's nimbleness, commitment, and support in ways that are organic, innovative, mindful, and mutual in reaching diverse communities in the seven (7) county area. ~ **Jesse Bethke Gomez, Executive Director**

Central to MCIL's work is the belief that the family system is the basic societal human organizational system in which individuals survive and thrive. Given that foundation, MCIL asks questions such as, "What are the family, other supports and systems in place to support the individual? What are their beliefs about independent living, disability, person centeredness, and aspirations for their future?" By answering these and other questions, MCIL empowers individuals and their support systems. In addition, the organization embraces independent living philosophy, with the understanding that language and culture are pivotal factors in how people interact with the world around them and navigate through life. Thus, MCIL supports people with the principles of independent living and person-centeredness in making their own choices about their lives and their future.

The organization works with schools in North Minneapolis, an urban area predominant in diverse communities where many people live in poverty. The goal of this effort is to provide services to students with disabilities that prepare them for the transition to adulthood in partnership with schools. MCIL has deepened its work in helping young people and their parents from diverse communities prepare for the societal challenges they may be confronted with as they move to independence, full engagement, and participation in the communities of their choosing. The program seeks to help students grow in their decision-making skills and determine what's important in their lives for themselves.

MCIL has long been on the cutting-edge of service delivery. It was recently awarded a Community Civic Engagement grant to support consumers with learning how to become effective advocates for themselves and their communities. MCIL also has Independent Living Vocational Rehabilitation (ILVR) Specialists deployed in 13 metro area Vocational Rehabilitation Services Offices in Workforce Centers under the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. These individuals work alongside employment counselors to help people stabilize life issues and pursue employment-attainment goals. In this unique relationship between the governmental and nonprofit sectors, MCIL employs interpreters to serve a vast array of consumers. The organization's belief is that there is added value in addressing life issues that are otherwise outside the scope of employment preparation. Providing these services in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner is equally important.

MCIL has a commitment to utilize technology as a best practice in quality and performance. The organization brought Social Solutions onboard in 2016 and is utilizing its Apricot® software. Using this new client data platform allows MCIL to automate compilation of key data needed for its annual reporting requirements. The organization utilizes aggregate data for its internal metrics to analyze results against key performance indicators. MCIL is well positioned in real-time with pertinent information as a center for independent living (CIL).

## **Efforts in Local and National Work to Improve Diversity and Cultural Competence**

MCIL has partnered with organizations, agencies, and businesses to increase access to services for individuals with disabilities within its geographic service area. It recently participated in a large grass-roots rally at the State Capitol in July 2017, to increase awareness of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and its importance in the state of Minnesota. Its executive director has also worked at the statewide level to address issues of health disparities experienced by communities that are linguistically and culturally diverse. This applies to traditionally marginalized communities, such as African American and American Indian as well as emerging communities, such as those with Somalian immigrants.

MCIL's work has been applauded by consumers as well as by other entities. Its staff members have been recognized by numerous organizations and have represented MCIL in various prominent ways. To name a few, Jesse Bethke Gomez was identified as one of the 100 most influential healthcare

leaders in Minnesota (2008–2012). He has also contributed a chapter to the internationally consulted book *Innovative Voices in Education: Engaging Diverse Communities*. In addition, Kelly Krantz, MCIL’s Director of Independent Living Services, was selected to participate in the Leadership Institute of Georgetown University National Center for Cultural Competence. These and other achievements underscore the organization’s commitment to building cultural competence organizationally, locally, and nationally.

## **New Directions for Cultural Competency and Diversity**

MCIL is committed to diversity, inclusion, and outreach. The enterprise is currently in the midst of strategic planning and seeks to build upon its strong foundation. The agency will continue its ongoing outreach efforts in reaching people with disabilities from the African American, Latino, Hmong, Somalian, and other communities.

On an external level, MCIL is concerned about how people with disabilities are faring. MCIL is concerned with how policies can impact people and is committed to bringing issues to the forefront and improving the lives of individuals with disabilities.

## **Closing Comments**

MCIL views itself as an organization that embraces a culture of learning. It celebrates the hopes and dreams of all people and believes that language and culture are two critical ways in which people understand and interact with the world in which we all live. It approaches relationships with consumers and other organizations in a spirit of mindfulness, holding on to the expectation that MCIL and its staff members will reap the greatest benefit of learning from these interactions.