

Youth Program Snapshots

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For additional information please contact ILRU at ilru@ilru.org.

All In: Advancing Leadership, Learning Independence

Amy Burns & Beki Roberts, Wyoming Independent Living (Laramie, WY)

How It Works

Target students (age and disabilities): Cross-disability. Ages 18-21 in Laramie and 15-21 in Wheatland.

Key partners: Schools and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).

How it started: Wanted to offer workshops geared towards transition. IL/Advocacy Manager Becky Roberts created the program over three months and piloted in high schools. She mixed and matched materials from several sources into our curriculum.

Who leads the activities: IL Specialists. Preferably two facilitators for each session so one can work on the agenda and the other on student involvement.

What is the curriculum: Set up as four modules with four one-hour sessions (16 total classes) with an emphasis on understanding rights, self-awareness, self-advocacy, speaking up, and using their voices. Incorporate active learning with interactive discussions and activities with the goal of students applying the curriculum to their lives.

When and where is the program held: Year-round in two schools in different cities.

How do you know it is working (results): Youth living independently and addressing other needs of youth, including creating a peer group to get their driver's licenses.

Financial support: Past fee-for-service transition workshop funds and core funding.

Next steps: 1) Expand to at least three communities. 2) Put evaluation measures in place to figure out effectiveness, success, knowledge growth, etc. 3) Allow youth to find their own answers to some of the questions we pose and share with the group more.

Lessons Learned

Greatest challenges or barriers: 1) Working through VR system, but local counselors have been great. 2) Getting on the same page as educators who may want to shy away from talking about disability with youth or limit who has access to the curriculum. 3) Connecting with young folks – our referral source doesn't necessarily see the value of what we are bringing. 4). Creating three-way partnerships with VR and schools.

Things we wish we knew earlier: Understanding what our niche is in regard to what we uniquely can offer youth (IL philosophy of self-determination, choice, control, etc.), instead of what schools and VR say youth need (specific skills, such as cooking).

What advice do you have: 1) Go watch CILs with successful youth programs or tour mentor organizations. 2) There are many areas that you can cover. Focus on your CIL's unique areas that youth won't get elsewhere, if you are limited with funding and staff.

For questions about the All In program, please contact Beki at rroberts@wilr.org or Amy at aburns@wilr.org or by phone at 307-721-4071.

Building and Encouraging Youth Opportunities in North Dakota (BEYOND)

Scott Burlingame and Jamie Hardt | Independence Inc. (Minot, ND)

How It Works

Target students (age and disabilities): Students ages 14-22 enrolled in public secondary schools.

Key partners: Rural school co-ops and state vocational rehabilitation (VR).

How it started: The new Executive Director led a series of community engagement activities to frame the needs and joined other youth collaboratives. Then, we identified one key person in each school who became an ally.

Who leads the activities: Activities are led by the CIL staff.

What is the curriculum: Three core areas: self-awareness, self-advocacy, and independent living with 15-30 weekly lessons. IL staff work with teachers to identify areas where their students need more information. The lessons are interactive and fun.

When and where is the program held: BEYOND is taught weekly in 10 to 12 schools in about 23 classrooms during the academic year. Lessons are about 45 minutes each.

How do you know it is working (results): Students completing BEYOND have a 98% graduation rate from high school compared to a 65% rate in North Dakota. Pre-post tests assess core competencies and skillsets by asking three questions at the beginning and end of each lesson. Additionally, anecdotal comments are collected.

Financial support: Initial support in 2010 came from the America Reinvestment and Recovery Act. Then community grants provided funding until the CIL utilized its core funding. Currently about 50% of the funding comes through VR.

Next steps: 1) Focusing on getting beyond the classroom by using BEYOND as a catalyst to open the door to other IL services. 2) Tracking student employment data. 3) Developing a community of youth.

Lessons Learned

Greatest challenges or barriers: 1) Getting a foothold in schools takes patience and key allies in each school. 2) Hiring and keeping successful youth transition specialists in their role for more than a year was a challenge. 3) Making our data management system more flexible, so we are not spending all our time doing data collection.

Things we wish we knew earlier: Every special education teacher and every parent is overwhelmed. We can come in and make their lives easier and achieve the goals we all agree on—this is what got us in the door.

What advice do you have: Remember youth programs are the best investment in time and money for positive future outcomes for youth with disabilities.

For questions about BEYOND, contact Scott at Scottb@independencecil.org or Jamie at Jamie@independencecil.org or by phone at 701-839-4724.

Life 101

Timmie Roberts | Disability Network (Wayne County, Detroit, MI)

How It Works

Target students (age and disabilities): Ages range from 14 to 26, but have to be attached to an institution, which can be college, day treatment, high school, etc. Taught between 300 – 400 kids the first year in multiple schools and are currently in 20 schools.

Key partners: Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and educational institutions.

How it started: The Executive Director and youth staff got the idea after attending a training. We planned for about a year with input from a statewide group of CILs.

Who leads the activities: All of the CIL youth program staff, and others as needed.

What is the curriculum: Disability connection and pride, communication skills, goal setting, leadership skills, job exploration and readiness, understanding rights and responsibilities, peer mentoring, and self-advocacy taught in ten customizable sessions.

When and where is the program held: Taught in different schools which set the schedule. Usually one hour twice weekly or two hours once weekly.

How do you know it is working (results): Seeing student growth in skills and understanding. Students get jobs or go on to college or a trade school. Getting students excited to take the Life 101 classes in the next academic year. Additionally, we use pre and post-tests to show learning differences, and surveys to determine if they enjoyed the sessions or if they wanted to learn anything else.

Financial support: Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) funding source and fee-for-service from the Michigan Rehabilitation Services.

Next steps: Being more streamlined with concrete outcomes (job, college, etc.) for all.

Lessons Learned

Greatest challenges or barriers: Creating programming or curriculum that was interactive and enjoyable, and getting students to come to class. The more interactive, relevant, relaxed and fun the class, the more students come. Students are in charge of how they learn, the structure, and setting the classroom rules.

Things we wish we knew earlier: How to grab the student's attention. We learned to make it fun, interactive, and centered around topics students are interested in. Now, we let students be in charge and make the program flexible and customizable so students get the most out of it.

What advice do you have: 1) Be quickly adaptable when a topic falls flat and try something new. 2) Meet the youth where they are at, no matter what age. 3) Let them be in control as much as possible, so it feels like the class is for them instead of adults traditionally picking what and how to learn.

For questions about Life 101, please contact Timmie Roberts at timmie@dnwayne.org or by phone at 313-923-1655.

Live Out Loud

Nelly Gomez & Alan Cruz | Dayle McIntosh Center (Anaheim, CA)

How It Works

Target students (age and disabilities): All youth and cross-disability.

Key partners: Relied on internal staff at the Center. The Anaheim Accessibility Center currently offers space.

How it started: Started in 2017 because youth wanted a time and place where they could just hang out and chill. Youth coordinator and director made sure it happened.

Who leads the activities: CIL youth coordinators and program manager.

What is the curriculum: The goal is for youth to be more social, communicate, and be themselves; just providing a time and place where they can have fun, socialize, and relax with each other.

When and where is the program held: First Saturday of the month from 11:00 am to 3:30 pm.

How do you know it is working (results): It is a popular program that draws crowds. Once youth enjoy themselves and feel comfortable, we invite them to take a look at our other programs. Can be a catcher for youth to learn about our center activities.

Financial support: A Wells Fargo Foundation Grant was used to start the program. Currently funding is Title VII Subchapter (Part) B Grant and Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG Grants) as well as fundraising.

Next steps: Add more options like a quiet space, different video game stations, and maybe some group games to bring us together and help the newer youth feel more comfortable.

Lessons Learned

Greatest challenges or barriers: Definitely finding the space. At first it was in our conference room, but now we hold it in the Anaheim Accessibility Center with different stations to participate in any activity they want (arts and crafts, board games, karaoke, video games, etc.) plus bean bag chairs if they just want to hangout.

Things we wish we knew earlier: What we can do to get them interested in attending, including the games they love and activities they enjoy the most.

What advice do you have: Nothing about youth without youth. Definitely ask your youth about what they are interested in, what kind of activities they enjoy and want to engage in, how they want to benefit, and the best time for them to come. Saturdays often work well as they may be more available. Offer a number of different options, such as video and board games, arts and crafts, and other things to do. Ask if they need a quiet space because it can get noisy.

For questions about Live Out Loud, please contact Nelly at ngomez@daylemc.org or Alan at acruz@daylemc.org or by phone at 714-621-3300.

Peer Support Program

Nelly Gomez & Alan Cruz, Dayle McIntosh Center (Anaheim, CA)

How It Works

Target students (age and disabilities): All youth and cross-disability.

Key partners: The Anaheim Accessibility Center hosts the program.

How it started: Started in 2018 from a Youth Advisory Committee member suggestion to have a place where youth could come discuss their experiences and share advice. The member, staff, and manager planned where, when, and how. Youth were asked what they would like to see happen and how they hoped to benefit.

Who leads the activities: CIL staff and a Youth Advisory Committee member facilitate.

What is the curriculum: The goal is for youth to learn how to provide peer support, share their experiences/advice, and feel more comfortable with each other. Youth pick the discussion topics for staff to research, provide a few tips or tricks, and start with icebreakers and questions to facilitate conversations.

When and where is the program held: Saturday at the Anaheim Accessibility Center.

How do you know it is working (results): The youth are starting to actually help each other out and know that they can come to the group for support. Additionally, 5-8 youth attended in the first year, and we now have 10-13 who usually attend.

Financial support: In the first year, A Wells Fargo Foundation Grant was used to start the program. Currently, funding is through our CIL's Title VII Subchapter (Part) B funds, the City of Anaheim Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG Grants), and fundraising. Parents also provide some supplies.

Next steps: Work on increasing attendance and providing more peer support to one another.

Lessons Learned

Greatest challenges or barriers: 1) Figuring out the best schedule and pairing it with something fun afterwards (now pair with our Inclusive Improv program). 2) Getting youth interested in it because some students are shy. 3) Slow in getting the conversations and discussions started, but now youth pick the topics and then staff plan fun interactive icebreakers and discussion questions with a few tips or tricks beforehand.

Things we wish we knew earlier: 1) How to get youth to talk, open up, and have a conversation. 2) How to approach youth. 3) Youth peer mentoring is a win-win.

What advice do you have: Nothing about youth without youth. Ask your youth about what they want to see, how they want to benefit, and the best time for them to come. Saturdays tend to work well as they don't have school and are usually more available.

For questions about the Peer Support program, please contact Nelly at ngomez@daylemc.org or Alan at acruz@daylemc.org or by phone at 714-621-3300.

Students for Life

Chasidy Ortiz & Neil Ligon, LIFE – Living Independence for Everyone (Savannah, GA)

How It Works

Target students (age and disabilities): Currently high school age. Cross-disability.

Key partners: United Way, Employability, two hospitals, and one university. Parent Mentor Organizations for school access, community buy-in and resources.

How it started: A prior Independent Living Skills Coordinator brought the program from another CIL, and the new program grew out of this framework. The idea was to find a way to engage youth in school with other young adults with disabilities with similar experiences. The peer support model was essential to its delivery.

Who leads the activities: IL Coordinators present on different topics and provide peer support.

What is the curriculum: Year-long program with more than 15 different one-hour topics/lessons, taught in two phases focused on independent living and daily living skills. Learning is interactive with activities interspersed throughout the lessons.

When and where is the program held: Started with seven schools and has grown to ten. Also taught in different venues through partners.

How do you know it is working (results): We ask at the end of each session what students liked, did not like, want to keep, or change. Students seem to have a good time, are more engaged, interactive, verbal, and able to be their own self-advocate. In this year, the program taught 150 students with three months to go.

Financial support: United Way, City of Savannah, and Subchapter (Part) B and C dollars under I & R.

Next steps: Expand the size of the program to middle schools and more locations. Train new instructors in the process and develop new community partnerships.

Lessons Learned

Greatest challenges or barriers: 1) Finding funding. 2) Getting into the schools. 3) Convincing people to buy-in to a different concept without a track record.

Things we wish we knew earlier: 1) How long it was going to take and how persistent you need to be. 2) Importance of forming relationships and explaining your vision. 3) Need to be visible and attend community events. 4) Finding community resources.

What advice do you have: Be patient with the process, form relationships, and expect to invest first before you get any return. Take time to build the program right with a clear plan in place, but be open to alternative plans as unexpected things arise. Keep your vision and goals in mind. Secure funding and identify what is and is not working.

For questions about the program, please contact Chasidy at cortiz@lifecil.com or Neil at nligon@lifecil.com or by phone at 912-920-2414.

Youth Employment Services (YES) – A Life Readiness Program

Brett Eisenberg | Bronx Independent Living (Bronx, NY)

How It Works

Target students (age and disabilities): The youth participating are high school students or recent high school graduates with all types of disabilities.

Key partners: ACCES-VR (New York's Vocational Rehabilitation Program)

How it started: Through the Ticket to Work program, we trained individuals and started building a curriculum. In partnership with Walgreen's, we trained individuals to work in their stores. We also assessed the types of jobs within our organization (office skills, social services) and with what we had learned, we developed a variety of training/activities around life skills. YES started in 2016.

Who leads the activities: Three full-time staff lead the curriculum with guest speakers.

What is the curriculum: The curriculum is interactive and includes information that youth are interested in and can learn from. The YES course is 30 hours and successful completion results in a paid internship of at least 90 hours of work experience. We usually do three 30-hour courses a year with 50 students completing YES each year.

When and where is the program held: Classes are held at the CIL with internships across the community.

How do you know it is working (results): Success is measured by the number of youth who are placed in a paid internship following their successful completion of the life-readiness curricula. Initial success rate was 94%.

Financial support: The CIL pays for the internship costs and ACCES-VR reimburses the Bronx CIL in a fee-for-service arrangement.

Next steps: Expanding the internship opportunities into the media industry. We are always trying to increase the variety and quality of internships available.

Lessons Learned

Greatest challenges or barriers: 1) Required paperwork can be cumbersome. 2) Registering the students at the same time is also tricky. 3) Ensuring the information presented in the classes matches what is needed for the internships is complex.

Things we wish we knew earlier: 1) We did not realize that many of the students would not self-identify as a person with a disability. We had to think through how to address that. 2) Also, initially we were too lenient with students missing classes, which resulted in having to rearrange staff schedules to provide make-up opportunities.

What advice do you have: 1) Having the right staff in place is critical to success. Staff that can identify with and relate to the youth make all the difference. 2) Also, taking time to develop and customize the curriculum really strengthened the program.

For questions about YES, contact Brett at brett@bils.org or at 718-515-2800.