Central Coast Center for Independent Living (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

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

* 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.

Support for development of this technical assistance information was provided by the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living under grant number 90TT0001. No official endorsement of the Department of Health and Human Services should be inferred. Permission is granted for duplication of any portion of this information, providing that the following credit is given to the project: Developed as part of the IL-NET, an ILRU/NCIL/APRIL/USU-CPD National Training and Technical Assistance Program (2018).