“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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diverse Groups: U.S. Census Categories</th>
<th>CIDNY’s Community (%)* $(n = 8,491,079)$</th>
<th>CIDNY’s Consumers (%) $(n = 1,629)$</th>
<th>CIDNY’s Staff (%) $(n = 76)$</th>
<th>CIDNY’s Board (%) $(n = 5)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>21.2</td>
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<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>30.6</td>
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<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>26.5</td>
<td>23.7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>&lt; 1.0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
<td>&lt; 1.0</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race Unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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 workgroup 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.

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