



MY-CIL Practice Brief #2

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Improving Service Delivery to Out-Of-School Youth from Minority Backgrounds: Case Study Findings from the Southern California Resource Services for Independent Living

In this brief: The Southern California Resource Services for Independent Living (SCRS-IL) is a CIL serving primarily Latinx and Asian American consumers in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties. In addition to providing core independent living services, SCRS-IL has developed employment programs and organizational practices that support youth with disabilities who come from minority backgrounds. The purpose of this case study brief is to highlight SCRS-IL’s approach to serving minority youth, which includes ensuring intersectionality in multiple ways, coordinating outreach and advocacy efforts through interagency collaboration, and providing paths to employment.

Ensure intersectionality in multiple ways

The staff of SCRS-IL embody the diversity of the community they serve and ensure intersectionality as the core of their service delivery. Almost all SCRS-IL staff (95 percent) are from minority backgrounds and live in the same communities as consumers, and many are fluent in Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, and/or American Sign Language. “We’re a minority agency in everything we do,” said Rudy Contreras, SCRS-IL’s executive director.

To support youth with disabilities who are growing into their full identities, staff conduct formal trainings with youth on topics such as advocacy, disability pride, and identity. They offer formal trainings in schools, through Zoom webinars, and in person to youth groups and families. Throughout these trainings, staff keep intersectionality in focus as youth explore how all aspects of their identities—racial or ethnic group, gender and sexuality, disability, and other social categorizations—intersect.

Staff also receive extensive and ongoing training through the SCRS-IL training academy. In the first 30 days of their employment, the CIL cross-trains all employees in every program and

About the MY-CIL Project. Minority Youth and Centers for Independent Living (MY-CIL) is a collaborative effort of Hunter College; the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York; Independent Living Research Utilization; and Mathematica. The Administration for Community Living’s National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research and the Office of Independent Living Programs funded MY-CIL to improve outcomes for out-of-school youth and young adults (ages 14 to 24) with disabilities. It seeks to produce and share knowledge that empowers Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to improve outcomes for youth and young adults with significant disabilities from nationally recognized racial and ethnic minority groups who have completed or otherwise left secondary education.

About SCRS-IL

To learn more about SCRS-IL’s mission and services, watch [this video](#) featuring SCRS-IL staff.

service regardless of their department. This intensive cross-training occurs in house and ensures staff provide an integrated set of services and can step in for each other when necessary. In this way, cross-trained staff familiarize themselves with all of SCRS-IL's programs, services, and resources and can better support or assist consumers. After initial training, SCRS-IL continues with monthly departmental and quarterly all-staff trainings, which focus on successful ways to improve or expand service delivery.

Lessons Learned from the MY-CIL project

To learn more about promising practices CILs use to better serve out-of-school youth from minority backgrounds, read [this issue brief](#), "**Promising Practices to Help Minority Youth with Disabilities Make the Transition to Postsecondary Life.**"

Coordinate outreach and advocacy efforts through interagency collaboration

In 2016, SCRS-IL founded the East Los Angeles (LA) Disabilities Collaborative to bring together providers that serve people with disabilities in the LA area. At monthly meetings, Collaborative members network, share resources, and establish referral relationships across organizations for the Latinx, African American, and Asian American consumers with disabilities they serve. As a result of interagency collaboration, SCRS-IL received more referrals from other service providers, particularly for minority youth with disabilities who hadn't heard of SCRS-IL.

The East LA Disabilities Collaborative also functions as a unit for advocacy and mobilization to ensure the visibility and fair treatment of people with disabilities. In 2016, SCRS-IL hosted the first disability pride parade in Southern California, but faced initial pushback from city and county officials on the parade location. Instead of marching on the streets—as the city and county allow many other marches and festivals to do—officials urged them to use a shopping mall instead. In response, the Collaborative launched a unified response, posting public comments and meeting with city officials, until officials agreed to allow the parade and close streets as necessary. Due to these efforts, the annual disability pride parade brings more than 3,000 people with and without disabilities to share in the movement of inclusion and community.

Provide paths to employment

SCRS-IL provides direct employment services through programs with two state agencies: the State Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR). These agencies refer their consumers to SCRS-IL for an array of employment services—job placements, paid internships, pre-employment training, and technical assistance to support job retention—with the goal of attaining competitive integrated employment. Employment fosters independence and provides consumers with options. "Without financial means, you can't really live independently," said Contreras. "I think that's the most fulfilling component of these collaborations."

California State Department of Developmental Services

SCRS-IL collaborates with the DDS to provide pre-employment services to out-of-school youth with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD). Since 2017, SCRS-IL's program has served 400 transition-age youth; it has placed 70 percent of them in competitive integrated employment, 90 percent of whom remained in their positions for at least 12 months, according to Contreras.

Through the program, youth proceed through a stepwise service sequence, with the goal of achieving competitive integrated employment. When referred, youth receive soft skills training, which includes interview preparation, etiquette in the workplace, and workplace health and safety. These soft skills are essential to help youth seek and retain employment. Next, SCRS-IL staff provide job placement assistance, often through paid internship programs. In these paid internship programs, SCRS-IL pays for all wages and insurance, incentivizing participation among employers that might otherwise hesitate to hire individuals with I/DD. After completing the paid internship for three months, SCRS-IL staff meet with the employer to see if the placement was a good fit. If so, the employer might offer competitive integrated employment to the individual. SCRS-IL staff continue to provide job supports for several months to support retention.

California Department of Rehabilitation

The DDS program focuses heavily on pre-employment services, and the DOR partnership serves those ready to transition directly into employment with minimal pre-employment work. Since 2002, SCRS-IL's program has served thousands of transition-age youth, successfully placing 60 percent of participants in competitive integrated employment and retaining 80 percent in their positions for at least 90 days, according to Contreras.

Program participants receive job placement and retention services, along with some pre-employment services, including resume-building and interview skills training. Because of the range of services SCRS-IL provides, it acts as a one-stop shop for out-of-school youth with disabilities. When youth begin working with SCRS-IL staff on their employment goals, they can also receive the many other traditional CIL services, such as benefits counseling, housing assistance, assistive technology, and peer support, along with the full range of DOR's services. In this way, SCRS-IL's program functions as a wraparound support for youth to achieve their independent living goals beyond employment.

Improve employment prospects through postsecondary educational programs designed for youth with disabilities

For youth with I/DD who want to advance their careers and earnings beyond entry-level jobs, SCRS-IL developed several educational programs, including the Empowering Disability Groups through Education (EDGE) program and a science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) extracurricular group for high school students. Through these programs, youth receive supports to achieve their postsecondary education goals and build concrete skills that can lead to better career opportunities.

About SCRS-IL's educational programs

To learn more about SCRS-IL's educational programs, including Project Innovate, Project Quest, and Project Destiny, read [the Home page](#) of their website.

EDGE program

The EDGE program, developed by SCRS-IL in collaboration with DDS’s regional centers, provides in- and out-of-classroom supports with immediate tutorial intervention supports to help students with I/DD earn an associate degree in a major of their choosing. Currently, SCRS-IL partners with three colleges for this program—Compton College, East LA College, and Cerritos College—and is looking to expand to additional colleges. “It used to be that if you had I/DD, you went to college for social recreation,” said Contreras. “We wanted to change that.” Current students in the program study cosmetology, design, child development, mathematics, physics, and philosophy, among other majors.

EDGE program

To learn more about SCRS-IL’s EDGE program, watch [this video](#) featuring testimonies directly from the youth engaged in SCRS-IL programs that have helped them develop as individuals and prepared them for future success

The transition from high school to college can prove especially daunting to students with disabilities, because many high school students receive specialized instruction and supports through Individualized Educational Plans or 504 plans. “A lot of the supports they were used to in high school aren’t available in college,” said Contreras. “Accommodations exist but are not at the same level as high school.” SCRS-IL’s EDGE program fills that gap, providing guidance on communication skills, sharing available resources, balancing their personal and educational lives, and counseling on fulfilling goals.

STEM extracurricular group for high school students

SCRS-IL also offers secondary school-level STEM education for youth with disabilities, who often are excluded from schools’ existing programs because of insufficient access to accommodations. Drawing on Contreras’s personal connections, the CIL partnered with engineers from the Columbia Memorial Space Center to create extracurricular programs for youth with disabilities who wanted to work on STEM projects. The first group of youth built a fully functional braille embosser out of Lego robotics. “It showed that individuals with disabilities are capable of participating in and creating STEM projects, just like anyone else,” said Contreras. The program also prepares youth with disabilities who are interested in STEM—and the career advancement opportunities available in the field—to pursue postsecondary education and achieve their personal goals.

Youth Transitions Program

To learn more about SCRS-IL’s transition services that make STEM programs accessible to youth with disabilities, watch [this video](#).

CILs working with similar youth populations might find it useful to consider SCRS-IL’s practices and activities, which include staff training, interagency collaborations for outreach and advocacy, and employment and educational programs.

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To learn more about MY-CIL

To learn more about MY-CIL, please visit: <https://minorityyouthcil.com/>

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