



## **MY-CIL Practice Brief 13**

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### **Engaging transition-age Hispanic and Latino youth with disabilities in Oakland, California: Case study findings from Berkeley CIL and Fruitvale CIL**

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**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. Specifically, the project 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.

**Clarifying terms:**

**Youth from minority backgrounds.** MY-CIL uses the term *youth from minority backgrounds* to refer to transition-age youth and young adults (ages 14 to 24) from nationally recognized racial and ethnic minority groups.

**Out-of-school youth with disabilities (OSY) from minority backgrounds.** MY-CIL uses the term *OSY* to refer to transition-age youth and young adults with disabilities (ages 14 to 24) who have completed or otherwise left secondary education.

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### **In this brief**

Ed Roberts and others with disabilities founded the Berkeley Center for Independent Living (CIL) in Berkeley, California, as the first CIL in the nation. Today, the CIL serves Berkeley and the greater area of Oakland, California. Berkeley CIL maintains an outreach office in Oakland’s Fruitvale neighborhood, which has one of the largest Hispanic and Latino populations in the city. In 2023, more than 55% of the CIL’s services were delivered to consumers from minority backgrounds. We conducted three interviews with Berkeley and Fruitvale CIL client-facing staff to learn about their outreach, engagement, and program strategies. These interviews were conducted from the months of December 2023 through February 2024. The purpose of this practice brief is to summarize the promising practices that support their outreach and engagement to youth and young adults who identify as Hispanic or Latino.

### **Findings**

This section highlights four key themes about successful strategies that emerged from our discussion with Berkeley and Fruitvale staff. These include community networking; recruiting culturally proficient staff; tailored program strategies, including needs assessment; and measuring impact and success to inform and guide future endeavors.

## **Community outreach strategies**

- **Community networking.** The Berkeley and Fruitvale CIL conduct and participate in various community outreach activities tailored to Fruitvale’s diverse community. Once a month, Fruitvale CIL hosts resource fairs that last four hours. These resource fairs provide an opportunity to connect with OSY with disabilities from minority backgrounds. CIL staff also engage with local high schools, collaborate with schools’ transition programs, and use email to reach people. CIL staff translate materials such as flyers for Spanish-speaking families. In addition, the CIL conducts and contributes to community-building events such as the Fruitvale Fiesta, which was the 50th anniversary celebration of the CIL in Fruitvale, California, with local partners. This celebration featured speakers, activities, and performances that introduced Oakland’s Spanish-speaking community to Fruitvale’s services.

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### **Berkeley and Fruitvale CIL community outreach strategies**

- Attending community resource fairs
- Collaborating with high schools and transition programs
- Ensuring bilingual outreach with Spanish translation
- Hosting the Fruitvale Fiesta community-building event
- Using Instagram for outreach and referrals

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- **Social media.** CIL staff use social media such as Instagram to raise awareness of CIL programs and encourage self-referrals among youth. Camiel Hayes, a Youth Programs Coordinator said, “A lot of consumers find us through Instagram. I know firsthand from my experience with [the youth] demographic; it’s pretty relevant.” She also highlighted social media’s evolving landscape and value as a tool for engaging youth: “I wish we would get on TikTok, I think there’s a lot of power to it, to reaching out to transitional age youth especially.”

## **Staff Recruitment**

- **Bilingual staff.** The Berkeley and Fruitvale CILs have made a concerted effort to recruit and retain staff who speak Spanish to build trust and reflect the Hispanic and Latino community they serve. In 2023, 21% of staff were bilingual. These staff can relate to the unique needs, challenges, and preferences of CIL consumers in these communities. “It does help when that individual [consumer] can see themselves in others,” said Hayes. Because CIL staff play a pivotal role in enhancing consumers’ independent living planning experience, the ability of Berkeley and Fruitvale staff members to tailor plans, understand cultural nuances, and access external resources exemplifies the organizations’ commitment to personalized support to the community.
- **Staff with lived experience.** The Berkeley and Fruitvale CILs also prioritizes recruiting people with lived experience because of their unique capacity for empathy when engaging with consumers. This deliberate hiring practice underscores the value placed on firsthand understanding and empathy in effectively serving the needs of the Berkeley and Fruitvale communities. “Coming into the world of disability [and] having an acquired disability, I have learned the power of semantics and how our language and the usage of it matters a lot,”

said Hayes. “Microaggressions and our own personal biases, we have to check those. [For example,] If I’m showing images, I’m always trying to find resources that are competent and applicable to the youth that I’m serving.”

## **Program Strategies**

Sustained engagement with programs is critical to fostering independent living, social inclusion, and skill development in OSY with disabilities from minority backgrounds. The section that follows highlights the Berkeley and Fruitvale CIL’s innovative strategies meant to encourage engagement, including efforts to understand youth consumers’ needs; enhance communication; and tailor independent living services.

- **Understanding youth needs.** CIL staff make significant efforts to understand the needs of OSY with disabilities from minority backgrounds, empowering consumers to advocate for themselves, and actively participating in the decision making process for services. This pursuit of understanding promotes equity by ensuring equitable access to services and addressing unique challenges and barriers. CIL staff may conduct needs assessments to inform outreach or to modify programs based on interests. Kerry McKee, a Youth Outreach Coordinator, said, “I try to survey the youth themselves in terms of what kinds of activities they would like to see us do at these events. [I] try to be open-minded in terms of what activities might motivate youth to attend.” Other efforts include staff conducting surveys to understand consumers’ preferences and identifying goals and needs through one-on-one sessions with consumers. Staff can identify multiple program and service preferences (such as job fairs; job placement workshops; a social club for transition-age youth; and classes for coding, yoga and dance) through these assessments and surveys.
- **Enhancing communication.** Because communication is reciprocal, CIL staff make efforts to enhance communication between staff and consumers to ensure a thorough understanding of their expressed needs, the services available to them, and the strategies for addressing any unmet needs consumers might have. This empowerment fosters the autonomy and self-advocacy critical for engaging OSY with disabilities from minority backgrounds. Efforts to enhance communication include staff facilitating clear communication and conducting follow-up with consumers. McKeen highlighted the importance of these efforts, saying, “I work with a lot of youth with cognitive disabilities, [and] I [may] have to text them many times to clarify what an online meeting means. [In this way, I am] supporting them to be more independent in understanding that.” CIL staff may choose to involve a consumer’s support system—parents, guardians or chosen family members—who can further advocate for the consumer’s needs and provide practical, emotional, and financial support. Involving the consumer’s support system will also promote consistency in approach and reinforce learned skills across different environments. Other communication enhancement strategies CIL staff implemented include providing materials and paperwork in multiple languages, including Spanish. The Berkeley and Fruitvale CILs translated 28 materials in 2023 as part of its communication enhancement strategies.
- **Tailoring independent living services.** Tailoring services for OSY with disabilities from minority backgrounds enhances comfort and engagement. By aligning programs and services with the needs of consumers, staff can cultivate lasting relationships and trust, leading to greater retention and sustained service engagement. McKeen emphasized the importance of tailoring independent living services: “Be open to listening [to consumers],

hearing what they want to accomplish, [and] doing that research to figure out how we can support them in working toward those goals. As well as working with youth from Latino or Hispanic backgrounds, just understanding that there's another layer to that. Maybe there's a language barrier, [or] family may be less aware of services available to them."

- Adelene Miranda, Bilingual Program Coordinator at Berkeley CIL, shared a success story about the impact of tailored services and described advocating and coaching a youth interested in artwork. "I [worked with] one youth about a year ago, she was [around] 18 [to] 19 and into arts. When we had the Fruitvale Fiesta, that gave her an opportunity to showcase her art at the event. She was coming to the Fruitvale [CIL] office [and] was a bit shy, but [she] wanted to get out there and be more independent," said Miranda. "She was able to showcase her art, and we referred her to an organization in Oakland that helps youth with disabilities who want to pursue art more." This personalized approach demonstrates how tailoring independent living services can help consumers achieve their goals effectively. In addition, staff discussed using independent living plans for goal setting, further emphasizing the commitment to personalized support and empowerment through the service delivery process.

## **Impact and measuring success**

Impact and measuring success are essential to engagement efforts because they provide a way to assess whether the efforts are achieving the desired outcomes. Consumer success and community referrals are tangible indicators of impact and success when engaging OSY with disabilities from minority backgrounds. By measuring progress in individual outcomes and assessing the extent to which partnerships and referrals contribute to holistic support, organizations can continuously improve their services to better meet the needs of this population based on real-world evidence.

- **Consumer success.** Berkeley and Fruitvale CIL staff highlighted the importance of evaluating and measuring success to ensure continuous consumer improvement. Fruitvale uses consumers' independent living plans to track the use of services such as assistive technology, housing, and self-advocacy services. Hayes said it is essential to recognize that individual success depends on personalized goals and can vary across consumers. "Measuring the impact [of independent living services] is based on the individual," said Hayes. "What might be success to one individual is different from another. So, it's just finding out what it is that they want, what their goals are, within their plan to establish those goals." By understanding each consumer's aspirations and needs, CILs can establish meaningful metrics for success.
- **Community referrals.** The Berkeley and Fruitvale CILs also measure success through their partnerships and referrals. The particular needs of OSY with disabilities from minority backgrounds require collaboration with specialized organizations. By leveraging strong community partners, CILs can efficiently address consumers' needs. Staff conduct research to connect consumers with appropriate services, facilitating referrals or warm handoffs. In 2023, the Berkeley and Fruitvale CILs collaborated with 35 service organizations to enhance independent living services. In their interviews, CIL staff gave many examples of these referrals. In one interview, Miranda noted that a lack of visa or citizenship documentation can hinder access to resources, but referring consumers to organizations that aid in obtaining

legal paperwork addresses immediate documentation needs and reduces future barriers to resources. Through strategic partnerships and referrals, CILs can ensure comprehensive support for OSY with disabilities from minority backgrounds.

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**Berkeley and Fruitvale CIL community referrals strategies**

- Assisting with legal aid and medical resources
  - Collaborating with high schools and transition programs
  - Assisting with citizenship programs
  - Assisting with job placement
  - Collaborating with local arts programs
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## Discussion

CILs need effective strategies for engaging OSY with disabilities from minority backgrounds to ensure inclusivity, address unique needs, and promote equal opportunities. This brief summarized findings from the Berkeley and Fruitvale CILs that highlight their outreach and program strategies in a predominately Hispanic and Latino community. These strategies emphasize the importance of community outreach and recruiting multilingual staff who reflect the community's diversity for enhanced trust, inclusivity, and programming. The CIL staff members' efforts underscore the significance of independent living programs in promoting independence, social inclusion, and skill development across OSY with disabilities from minority backgrounds. Finally, a common thread was the importance of impact measurement, which acknowledges the individual nature of success and its role in shaping service provision and outreach. The Berkeley and Fruitvale CILs have demonstrated success using these practices as they engage Hispanic and Latino OSY with disabilities.

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**Are you interested in reading more MY-CIL case studies on service delivery to out-of-school youth?**

Check out [Practice Brief #2: Improving Service Delivery to Out-Of-School Youth from Minority Backgrounds: Case Study Findings from the Southern California Resource Services for Independent Living](#)

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## References

U.S. Census Bureau Quickfacts, U.S. Census Bureau, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov). Accessed 2/4/2024.

## Acknowledgements

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### **To learn more about MY-CIL**

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

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