HELPING YOUTH THRIVE

HELPING YOUTH THRIVE THROUGH AN EQUITY LENS

PLWG
PROGRAM LEADERS
WORKING GROUP

FACT SHEET 6/12

4-H Program Leaders Working Group
Access, Equity and Belonging Committee

Youth with Disabilities

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Why an Equity Lens?

4-H has made a bold commitment to youth across the United States: to reflect the population demographics, vulnerable populations, diverse needs, and social conditions of the country (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017). 4-H has affirmed that we will help close the opportunity gap for marginalized youth and communities to fully thrive (Extension Committee on Organization and Policy, 4-H, 2019; National 4-H Council, 2020). Making good on these promises requires that all those working with youth in 4-H critically analyze current programs and deliver those programs through an equity lens. Administrators, professionals, volunteers, and stakeholders have a responsibility to be aware of and confront the disparities that exist within 4-H programs and in society. Doing so is critical because those who aim to develop youth without acknowledgment of and response to a young person's possible societal inequities is perpetuating injustice (Fields et al., 2018). The 4-H Thriving Model (Arnold, 2018) describes the process of positive youth development in 4-H. We should explore the 4-H Thriving Model, our national theoretical framework, with the same level of critical review to ensure it guides our work with equity and social justice at the fore.

The 4-H Program Leaders Working Group, Access, Equity, and Belonging Committee (AEBC) has joined with the 4-H Thriving Model Taskforce to ensure this nationally adopted model is explored and utilized through an equity lens. The following fact sheet explores the Thriving Model in relation to youth with disabilities.

The diversity of youth with disabilities served by Extension professionals is robust. The types of disabilities youth may live with requires an Extension professional first to familiarize themselves with the unique strengths and challenges of the youth, as well as a wide range of adaptations and accommodations that may be used to help the youth successfully participate with his/her peers. An equity lens will allow an Extension practitioner to understand the specific conditions they must consider when planning to program with youth with disabilities. Examples of a few such conditions are below.

Social Conditions of Youth Population

The population of youth with disabilities in the U.S. is diverse and includes all races, ethnicities, genders, and socio-economic statuses. Approximately 14 percent of public-school students receive services under the Individuals Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which translates to nearly 7.1 million youth ages 3-21 (NCES, 2019). However, not all students with disabilities receive school services so the actual number of youth with disabilities is hard to determine and may be much higher.

Disability can impact a youth in a number of ways including, but not limited to: physical mobility, information processing, sensory processing, general development, and learning (CDC, 2020). Ways in which disability affects a youth is very individualized and may not be the same as how it impacts someone else with the same disability. Not all disabilities are visible, so it is important for professionals to be prepared to adapt and be flexible when providing a program that is inclusive to all youth.

Providing inclusive spaces for youth with disabilities requires the transformation of communities based on social justice principles in which all community members:
- are presumed competent;
- are recruited and welcomed as valued members of their community;
- fully participate and learn with their peers; and
- experience reciprocal social relationships. (The National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability, 2020)

Inclusion requires opportunities for individuals with disabilities to participate in the same activities, events, and programs as individuals without disabilities- not separate programs. Participants without disabilities can experience greater awareness and learn that people with disabilities are not so different and have strengths and weaknesses, as well as unique abilities.

It is vital that all participants, those with and without disabilities, are provided with the same opportunity to learn and develop skills. Inclusion can result in a rewarding experience for all involved, including 4-H thriving developmental outcomes.

Three major laws are in place to ensure that people with disabilities have access to education and programming.
1) **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**
2) **The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504 and 508; and**
3) **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
Provides youth with qualifying disabilities free and appropriate public education. This law ensures that youth are provided modifications and adaptations when needed so that they can be set up to succeed in the most appropriate educational environment. A team of individuals (including the child's guardian) determines an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that identifies what specific accommodations are needed for the student to be successful.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Sections 504 and 508)
Like the ADA, the Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs run by federal agencies, and programs that receive federal financial assistance, which include institutions of higher education and their programs.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act ensures that the child with a disability has equal access to an education. The child may receive accommodations and modifications; for example, program accessibility and effective communication with people who have hearing or vision disabilities. Each federal agency has its own set of Section 504 regulations that apply to its programs.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires agencies to provide individuals with disabilities equal access to electronic information and data comparable to those who do not have disabilities, unless an undue burden (e.g., significant difficulty or expense) would be imposed on the agency. Public universities that receive federal funding through the Assistive Technology Act are required to meet Section 508 standards for web-based intranet and internet information and applications.

Examples of materials that require accommodations include:
- Videos that have audio must have captioning and text transcripts
- Audio files must have text transcripts
- Images must have alternate text or descriptions to convey meaning
- Color-blind individuals must be able to interpret a page successfully
- HTML tables must use the appropriate tags to designate column headers

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
Ensures that individuals with disabilities are not discriminated against in their access to public programs, transportation, and employment. This law identifies that businesses, community programs, and employers are required to make reasonable accommodations to allow individuals with disabilities access.

Competencies Needed to Engage Youth Population

It is critical for youth development professionals to work towards the development of skills and knowledge that allows programs to benefit all youth, including youth with disabilities. The following skills were adapted from the 4-H Professional, Research, Knowledge and Competencies (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017):

- Ensure that youth with disabilities have full access to participate in programs with peers. Plan ahead using universal design, observe the engagement level of the youth, and communicate with caregivers.
- Demonstrate commitment to learning more about the needs and interests of the youth with disabilities in your program. Engage the youth with a disability as you would any other youth and make efforts to get to know them as an individual.
- Employ strategies or actions to meet the diverse needs of youth with disabilities who participate in your program.
- Learn the policies that are in place to reduce or prevent ableism in your program. Ableism is the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities. Understanding what policies and procedures your state has for making sure accommodations are made for youth can help you to be proactive in your program development.
- Communicate to or about individuals with disabilities respectfully by using culturally appropriate terminology. For example, using the youth's name rather than referring to them as "the kid with the disability."
- Utilize community resources that are available to make programs inclusive of youth with disabilities. For example, receiving training by a local organization that advocates for people with disabilities.
- Adapt teaching methods to meet the needs of youth with disabilities in your program. For example, use visuals when explaining a concept.
- Use facilitation skills to encourage everyone's participation. For example, notice when a youth with a disability is not engaged and ask them a question or partner them with a friend to do the activity.
- Communicate with the youth with disabilities and parent(s)/caregiver to address challenges that may arise. For example, check in with caregivers before the program starts to see if there is anything you should be aware of and give a brief update at the end of the program session to let the caregiver know how the session went.
- Respond appropriately when a youth without a disability asks a question about the youth with a disability. "For example, if a youth without a disability asks, "Why is John in a wheelchair?" A response might be, "You should go ask John and he can tell you."

Belonging and Participation in 4-H

When facilitating inclusive programs, it is important to focus on common goals and end results for all participants, rather than the different means each person uses to achieve them. 4-H professionals can create an inclusive environment and make youth with disabilities feel welcome and create a sense of belonging by doing the following:

- Include information on recruitment materials that states youth with disabilities are welcome and the program will work to provide accommodations. Be sure to provide information on who should be contacted regarding needed accommodations.
- Be proactive in the preparation of programs. By using concepts of universal design, professionals can help programs and environments to be inclusive of all youth. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Universal Design (physical environment) are a set of principles for program development and environments that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn and participate (CAST, 2018). Universal Design is not a single, one-size-fits-all solution but rather a flexible approach that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs.
- Modify information and instructions to allow all youth to understand what is being presented. Some examples include a visual schedule, larger font, videos, demonstrations, and short simple instructions.

- Reduce segregation of youth with disabilities. Some activities may need to be adapted; however, professionals should work to keep peer groups together as much as possible.
- Emphasize the person's abilities, rather than their limitations. Try not to give excessive praise or attention to a youth with a disability or use words that evoke pity. Let the youth do or speak for themselves as much as possible. An individual's disability is very personal. Always keep in mind that maintaining confidentiality with regard to a youth's disability is essential.
- Show respect for others' dignity. Use appropriate language during discussions on disability. For example, the term handicap describes a situation or barrier imposed by society or environment and should not be used to describe an individual. Furthermore, talk to youth with disabilities in an age-appropriate manner and avoid speaking to them in a tone appropriate for a younger child.
- Show respect to others using the correct terminology when discussing them. Person-First Language refers to the intentional effort to recognize the person first before the disability. It describes what a person HAS, not what a person IS. An example of Person-First Language is: *Kate is a person with a disability versus Kate is a disabled girl*. However, some people prefer identity first language. For example, Kate is a disabled girl vs. Kate is a girl with a disability. If unsure what language to us, just ask the person.

Youth with disabilities come from varied socio-economic, cultural, and demographic backgrounds. Due to the intersectionality of this population, 4-H professionals should be aware and implement strategies that acknowledge the whole child, including their gender identification, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, etc. For further information and appropriate strategies, please refer to the other AEBC Youth Fact Sheets for the cultural, LGBTQ+, and racial demographics as well as the socio-economic backgrounds of youth with disabilities the 4-H professional is working with.

Consider these questions to help optimize participation for youth with a disability:

- Can the individual participate in the same activity in the same way as other program participants? If not, can the individual participate in the same activity with adapted materials or expectations? For example, if activity instructions are provided using pictures and/or minimum words.
- Will changing the physical environment allow the individual to participate more fully? For example, providing more space between tables, holding a class on the first level of a building, having supplies within reach, or reducing noise from music or outside.
- Will working on this project in a different group format allow this individual to participate more? For example, working with one other peer or in a small group of 2-3 versus one large group.
- Will reducing distractions help this individual participate or increase focus on the activity? For example, making sure that music is not too loud to hear instructions or making groups smaller, so each person is able to stay actively engaged.

Community Relationships and Partners

Community partners can be very helpful when seeking information or resources for including youth with disabilities. They are especially helpful when you or your colleagues need outside expertise and ideas about how to better serve youth with disabilities. While each community is unique, the table below presents resources that may be helpful when trying to get more information about serving youth with disabilities or developing partners specific to your community.

National Resources:
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- U.S Department of Health and Human Services
- Association of University Centers on Disability
- Department of Education: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation services
- American with Disabilities Act
- National Eye Institute

- National Institute on Deafness and other Communication Disorders
- American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD)
- National Center on Health, Physical Activity, and Disability (NCHPAD)
- Special Olympics
- Move United
- Kansas University Research Training Center on Independent Living Disability Language Pamphlet 9th edition

Local Resources:
- Parks and recreation Inclusion specialists or recreation therapists
- ARC and UCP centers
- Organizations Serving individuals with disabilities that may not be associated with a national organization

Evaluation

Evaluation is an important part of understanding the needs and outcomes of programs. If you are utilizing end-of-program evaluations or conducting other types of programmatic research, be sure to review the requirements and procedures of your organization, school, or university. It is important to provide appropriate accommodations (for example, read the questions to the individual or provide in a visual format); and determine the individual's ability to consent or who is legally authorized to consent on their behalf if conducting research.

Approaches
Community Engagement is a useful way of evaluating the needs of a community and developing informed policies and programs to address the specific programming needs of youth in your community.

- CDC Community Engagement Guide: This guide explains what community engagement is and how it can be used for evaluation or program development.
  https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/communityengagement/pce_what.html
- Disability engagement checklist: This guide from New Zealand helps to see community engagement through a disability frame and provides specific considerations related to disability
  https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/making-services-better-users/community-engagement-people-disabilities/engagement-checklist

Data Collection
Collecting information about youths' interest and/or participation in 4-H programming provides valuable information for program planning and program outcomes and can be critical for understanding our progress towards inclusion and meeting the needs of all participants. Popular data collection methods can be adapted to also include youth with disabilities. For example:
- Surveys: When collecting survey data for all youth participants it is important to create surveys that are at an appropriate reading level to all participants, some other adaptations may be used for youth with disabilities. These can include magnifying the screen, someone reading the questions, and a text reader program.
- Interviews: Interviewing youth can help educators better understand the context for youth interest or achieved outcomes. Structured or semi-structured focus groups can allow youth to express their interest or program outcomes in their own voice and may provide feedback that could not be captured on a survey. One-on-one interviews may also be an appropriate data collection method depending on what is being evaluated. Youths' comfort with the topic and being interviewed by someone should be taken into consideration when using this method. For youth with disabilities a potential adaptation could include; printed questions, questions provided ahead of time, introduction to the space and interviewer before the interview, or allowing a friend to be present.

- Focus Groups: For youth with disabilities, focus groups are a viable option for data collection. Some adaptations to consider would be: having small groups, providing the questions in print, or providing the questions ahead of time.
- Many other data collection methods exist for assessing youth outcomes and most, if not all, can be adapted for youth with various types of disabilities.

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