

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
**Beyond Participation: Increasing Inclusion Of Young Persons
With Disabilities In Community Youth Organizations**
Final Evaluation Report
By Dr. Carol Kochhar-Bryant

Our goal should be clear. We are seeking nothing less than a life surrounded by the richness and diversity of community. A collective life. A common life. An everyday life. A powerful life that gains its joy from the creativity and connectedness that come when we join in association to create an inclusive world. -- John McKnight, *Community and its Counterfeits*, 1995

“We knew in our organization that we needed to do more, but it wasn’t until the MEAF grant that that we could really focus on what we needed to do. At the leadership level we had a very narrow view of what ‘inclusion’ was.... The MEAF grant gave us a legitimate, recognized way to do much more.” – Beyond Participation national leader, 2005

Beyond Participation: Increasing Inclusion of Young Persons with Disabilities in Community Youth Organizations (2002-05) is funded by Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation (MEAF) and administered in partnership with Easter Seals (ES). Easter Seals has provided training and technical assistance to the three MEAF Grantee organizations: Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA), National 4-H Council (4-H), and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF). *Beyond Participation* (BP) was conceived to assist the Grantee organizations to adapt their programs, products, services and facilities in order to fully include children and youth with disabilities through (1) change in practices in selected demonstration sites, and (2) systemic change in the organizational cultures of the Grantees. The project encourages youth and adults with and without disabilities to work together and participate directly in planning, designing, implementing and integrating inclusive practices into the structure and culture of the organization.

General Lessons Learned From The BP Project

MEAF and ES have been pioneers in a new effort to shift from funding disparate ‘disability’ projects to promoting inclusion within large mainstream organizations that serve all children and youth. In the course of the BP project, MEAF and the Grantee organizations have learned that:

- A national philanthropic organization can provide effective leadership to promote significant change in mainstream youth organizations.
- Small pilot projects within mainstream organizations can leverage significant change over time with strong Grantee leadership and connection with a *learning community* (a new relationship created with another organization or among people within an organization who have not previously worked together, to share information, ideas, and solve problems).
- ‘Participation’ requires building collaborative, participatory communities *and partnerships* that provide opportunities for youth leadership.
- Fostering youth leadership begins with self-determination in the early years -- the skills and dispositions to look to the future and participate in decisions on one’s behalf – and requires the exercise of the individual’s voice and choice.
- Youth leadership is about strengthening values and building relationships among youth and between youth and adults—and across cultures and community differences .
- Youth workers and educators can be instrumental in teaching youth skills for self-determination.

The three BP participating organizations working together with MEAF and ES represent an innovative learning community and a community of practice that will continue beyond the project period.

General Findings for the BP Project

Each of the Grantees report specific data that provides evidence of the increase in program participation, leadership and social inclusion of youth in their pilot sites since the initiation of the BP project. In the final phase of the BP project (2005), there have been significant accomplishments by Grantees at the three levels of project outcomes: (1) youth with disabilities; (2) the Grantee organizations; and (3) the BP partnership among organizations. *Details of the individual Grantee organization accomplishments can be found in the full evaluation report.*

While it was difficult within the first two years for Grantees to systematically assess the experiences of youth as a result of participation in the BP partnership, both the 4-H and BCCA have recently launched evaluation initiatives of the size and scope to allow such impact assessment in the future. Major systemic changes in organizations typically take a minimum of 5 years and may be viewed as passing through a series of stages: (1) readiness; (2) implementation, institutionalization and sustainability; and (3) evaluation and scale-up. Into its 3rd year, the BP project can be described as in stages 3 and 4, with considerable institutionalization of initiatives within pilot sites (stage 3), and expansion of new inclusive practices across the whole organization (stage 4). The partnership among grantees and with MEAF and ES has created a 'learning community' -- through national meetings, conference calls, ongoing evaluation and sharing of information, and the creation of a project website-- that should sustain the exciting work and progress of Grantees in the years to come.

Summary of Findings, Level 1: Increased Participation of Youth With Disabilities in Programs

Findings include the following:

- A steady increase in the number of individuals with disabilities participating in Grantee programs and services along with non-disabled peers
- Grantees have learned from one another about effective strategies and useful resources.
- Grantees have met expectations of the partnership to establish youth councils in the pilot sites.
- Grantees have raised the awareness within their organizations of the need and importance of creating a culture of inclusion
- Grantee work at both the headquarters and in the pilot sites has stimulated *first-of-their-kind initiatives* and partnerships beyond the pilot sites that now impact their whole organizations.

Summary Of Findings, Level 2: Impact on Grantees Organizations

Grantees have:

- Made modifications in program policies to reflect a new sensitivity to diversity and inclusion; resources are being devoted at the national levels to pursue inclusion initiatives.
- Become more knowledgeable about a wide variety of potential partners in their local areas and BGCA and 4-H have both established new partnerships in their pilot sites.
- Reworked national web-sites to highlight the project and the inclusion theme
- Restructured staffing to ensure a national leadership role and improve resources to carry out inclusive activities; created a national National Training Associates Program
- Developed new partnerships at the national and local levels
- Created inclusion guidelines for both pilot and general sites; engaged inclusion experts to assist site teams
- Created and conducted national and regional training of staff and youth leaders
- Developed youth councils or advisories and engaged youth leaders in advocacy
- Revised brochures and materials to convey an inclusive message and created media kits
- Developed a listserv and website for professionals to share information among sites
- Established local governance group at sites
- Created youth-adult partnership curricula to help sites develop implement action plans
- Established self-assessment and evaluation initiatives.

Summary of Findings, Level 3: Accomplishments of the BP National Partnership

The BP partnership has effected change in Grantees in several areas: defining and communicating an inclusive mission, technical assistance and shared learning among Grantees, creating a community of learning, developing an evaluation orientation, engaging new partners at the national and local levels, and sustaining the initiative. Easter Seals contributed to the shared learning among Grantees and MEAF in a variety of ways: (1) developed a 'Culture of Inclusion' PowerPoint to support training and development; (2) developed quality guidelines for inclusion; (3) facilitated co-presentations at national conferences; (4) developed plans for systematic technical assistance and training across sites, including training in the Americans with Disabilities Act; (5) helped Grantees develop appropriate language for addressing identification of disabilities; (6) facilitated connections between grantees and Easter Seals affiliates nationwide; (7) facilitated involvement of youth volunteers with Grantee projects; (8) nurtured partnerships between organizations on selected projects at national and local levels; (9) supported media communication efforts; and 10) created the IncludingAllKids website, which will be a continuing resource for the BP participants as well as other organizations interested in adopting inclusive practices..

Based on the success of the BP project, MEAF and ES have reached out to other organizations to join the inclusion initiative. The organizations include the Boy Scout and Girl Scout Councils of Minneapolis/St.Paul., Minnesota-based Wilderness Inquiry, Kids Included Together. (KIT, San Diego), Boys & Girls Clubs of America (additional sites), Partners for Youth with Disabilities (Massachusetts), and Disabled Sports USA., Memoranda of Understanding have also been established between Easter Seals and both BGCA and the National 4-H Council, which will further consolidate the progress made toward full inclusion.

Challenges Faced By Grantees

Through conferences, conference calls, self-assessments, and direct interviews, the BP Grantees have shared many lessons. Here are some of their comments:

1. It is a challenge to get sites to communicate their work and partnerships; we need to directly encourage this communication as part of a systematic assessment.
2. Sites represent very different projects so we need to provide opportunities for them to be working together. We don't have a top-down mandate to tell them to work one way. We need to know how to do that and promote change.
3. It is not enough to get the buy-in from the top – we had to persuade the local affiliates.
4. Planning for sustainability is helpful to us. We could use funds to support these efforts. Sustainability has to be looked at in 2 different ways: (1) infusion of the philosophy; (2) support for direct assistance and TA to assist people to do it better.
5. We need help with identifying and tracking participants with disabilities. We can't ask about people's disabilities, so we can't track increases in participants with disabilities. We need assistance with regard to language on this that is not offensive. How can we better explain the initiative and how we can and want to accommodate and support?
6. Next time we would do things differently. We should have had a smaller number of sites with more resources, and more specific expectations on what we expect them to do.

For the complete Evaluation Report, contact:

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