

## **Positive youth development: Building capacity for disability inclusion in Oregon 4-H**

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**TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE:** County public health professionals with interest in positive youth development; Disability and public health students and researchers. Public health professionals interested in capacity building.

**ABSTRACT:** Participation in organized out-of-school activities contributes to positive youth development such as leadership skills, peer relationships and preparation for future employment. However, youth with disabilities are only half as likely to participate in structured out-of-school activities as their peers. Reaching 6 million youth annually, 4-H is the largest non-formal youth development program in the United States. This study examined the status of 4-H inclusion of youth with disabilities in Oregon, with attention to barriers and facilitators of disability inclusion. Using a theory-informed approach for behavioral change, we interviewed 23 key informants at three levels of this multi-tiered organization, including national leadership (3), centralized university faculty (10), and county staff from 5 counties (10). Analyses of transcripts were coded by pairs of researchers into theory-informed categories, protecting against individual bias and coder “drift”. Findings indicate a shared value of disability inclusion within 4-H across all levels, but substantial variability in perspectives on how disability inclusion can be accomplished and variability in intent to do so. Findings are interpreted from an organizational change viewpoint, as well as theory-informed opportunities for intervention. Because of Oregon's leadership in this area of 4-H, these findings are expected to have national influence.

### **OBJECTIVE(S):**

- Participants will be able to describe national and state 4-H initiatives to improve disability inclusion.
- Participants will be able to recognize the status, barriers to and facilitators of disability inclusion in the context of a positive youth development program.
- Participants will contribute to the researchers' interpretation of these initial findings, especially regarding implications for other after-school programs.

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