



Community Needs Assessment



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Introduction

This project addresses the urgent necessity to identify and better understand the needs of two important and overlapping audiences in Palo Alto and the Santa Clara County region: members of the disability community and at-risk, vulnerable populations, particularly in the COVID-19 recovery environment. The project engaged Scansion and Lisa Eriksen Consulting to work with a cohort of Partner Organizations, including the Palo Alto Art Center & Foundation, Children's Theatre, Palo Alto Library, and Palo Alto Junior Museum & Zoo, to develop and implement a community-based needs assessment to measure the needs of disabled, marginalized and at-risk populations in the region.

This needs assessment is designed to share information about who these audiences are and to determine their needs and desires. The results will allow the Partner Organizations to address the needs of these audiences in relevant programming for maximum impact. At the same time, the project intends to deepen existing relationships with community partners by developing a needs assessment that will be of use to service providers throughout the community. In addition, the assessment will be shared among the community so that the results will have a broad and favorable impact. Success will be evaluated based on the Partner Organizations' ability to deepen their partnerships within the community and on the ability to integrate the assessment findings into programming in meaningful and sustainable ways.

It is essential to highlight that throughout this process, we prioritized the perceptions of availability and access to resources and programs of the intended communities of focus. Our intention was not to provide information about available resources, even if existing programs could potentially meet the needs expressed by our participants. As a result, throughout the report, the reader may see recommendations for programs and activities that are already taking place. In those cases, targeted communications might be necessary.

This report is organized first to outline the project research methodology for both the at-risk, low-income populations, and disability populations, including initial interviews to identify focus, listening sessions, and one-on-one interviews. Then, the report focuses on the identified underserved communities: teenagers, parents with young children, seniors, and housing vulnerable. The specific needs and challenges, resilience points, and program interests identified in listening sessions with these communities are presented and summarized. The following portion of the report introduces the disability community and summarizes the needs and challenges identified in project interviews and the listening session. Analysis of the needs reported is presented by disability type to provide more clarity of both unique and intersecting challenges and solutions. Recommendations to meet the needs identified are then presented. A list of appendices provides details on the report findings.

Acknowledgments

~~Our gratitude goes out to the~~ project's partners in the community who assisted in conversations and organizing listening sessions. These include Youth Community Services, Palo Alto Community Child Care, Avenidas, Stevenson House, and Downtown Streets Team. We also thank Alta Housing, Canopy, Palo Alto Community Fund, Palo Alto University, Peninsula Healthcare Connection, Project Safety Net, Santa Clara County Department of Children's Services, the Palo Alto School District, and The City of Palo Alto's Human Relations Commission.

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Methodology

In order to achieve the project objectives, we designed and implemented the following methodology:

1. **Preliminary environmental scan with community organizations.** Twelve community organizations were consulted (full list in Appendix A) through a series of interviews with senior staff. The following needs were identified:

- a) Elementary school Initiatives that center on social and emotional learning, with a focus on early mental health support. Youth and Community Engagement initiatives grapple with participation challenges, emphasizing leadership groups and bonding initiatives. Mental Health and Wellness programs address COVID-19 impacts, promoting coping mechanisms, inclusive emergency responses, and vaccine information.
- b) Programs that prioritize the mental health of middle and high school students, advocating for bridge programs and heightened mental health awareness. Discussions revolve around resources equitable distribution and transparency, utilizing ARPA money. Senior-serving organizations focus on underserved populations, including low-income seniors, LGBTQ individuals, and the unhoused.
- c) Surveys and communication needs, overcoming language barriers, and emphasizing outreach to vulnerable populations. Unhoused and vulnerable populations consider art therapy as a supportive measure. Housing and community dynamics address insecurity, renters' rights, and loneliness, fostering community through events and programs.
- d) In a holistic view, the Palo Alto community confronts challenges, prioritizing inclusivity and well-being.

2. **Framing work sessions.** In collaboration with the Partner Organizations (Palo Alto Art Center/Foundation, Children's Theatre, Palo Alto Library, and Palo Alto Junior Museum & Zoo), we held a series of work sessions to frame the scope of the project, the scope of inquiry, overall approach, and target populations. Based on the preliminary environmental scan and on Partner Organizations' own observations of their own audiences and constituencies, four underserved and vulnerable populations were identified:

- Teens
- Parents with Young Children
- Seniors
- Housing Vulnerable

Note: in our inquiry within each of these communities, we included questions about disability and its consequences among individuals in that particular community.

We decided, among other considerations, to use an asset-based approach to the inquiry process with these communities with the goal of highlighting their values and sources of resilience and not only the scarcity of resources. This was decided with the intention that any programming that highlights the best of each community would resonate more deeply with them than focusing on what they lack. This is congruent with a human-centered approach that aims to focus on the lived experiences of the intended communities, looking at them as full people with needs, values, coping mechanisms, and aspirations. The scope of inquiry then would be based on identifying the most pressing needs of the intended communities, as well as the mechanisms through which they develop resiliency and coping mechanisms.

3. Listening Sessions & Engagement Opportunities. Once we defined the target populations and the scope of inquiry, we worked in collaboration with several community organizations to conduct a series of listening sessions with community members in order to understand and hear first-account narratives of their lived experiences. Recruitment was conducted with the support of community partners (mentioned above) that are in regular contact with these individuals, and each adult participant received a stipend in recognition of their effort, time, and input (teenagers did not receive a stipend per the recommendation of the recruiting organization's staff.)

The listening sessions were conducted in the location where the recruiting organizations regularly conduct their programs, and each had a duration of one to one and a half hours. During this time, we conducted interactive exercises to identify the most important needs, a deep dive into the community's coping mechanisms and resiliency, and a process to identify programmatic ideas that resonate with their needs and values. All listening sessions were recorded with permission from each participant, transcribed, and analyzed to create the final report.

We also had the opportunity to engage a group of seniors from a low-income community who do not speak English or whose fluency is very limited through an art activity designed and conducted by Taryn Curiel, a working artist and PAAC staff member who regularly conducts an art program funded by the Palo Alto Art Center Foundation at one of the community partner's centers. She engaged the seniors with the support of an interpreter and conducted a hands-on, artistic activity in which they described their communities and the most important resources and values in them through a collage.

4. Analysis and Synthesis. Once we gathered all the information described above, we conducted a thorough analysis and synthesis with an emphasis on providing an empathetic view of the intended populations. The analysis was based on qualitative methodologies looking to identify patterns and common themes among all participants, as well as focusing on their lived experiences with the goal of eliciting empathetic responses among readers of this report. As mentioned before, the overall approach, including analysis and synthesis, was based on highlighting community and individual assets and values and not only on challenges and limitations.

5. Final Report. The final report was designed to provide an experiential dimension to the needs of these communities. It highlights the most pressing needs as well as the values that help community members to overcome them. We included quotes that exemplify some of the ideas described in the narrative report, as well as some of the original materials produced in the listening sessions.

In addition to the aforementioned steps, we also conducted a thorough analysis of disability resources based on the following:

- Review of literature, reports, and other cities' disability initiatives and documents
- Interviews with seven representatives from the disability community
- A 30-minute listening session held during the Junior Museum & Zoo Accessibility Advisory Team meeting
- Each one of the listening sessions with the four underserved and vulnerable populations described above included a series of questions about the situation of disabled individuals within that community. Our goal was to inquire about the intersectionality of disability and the identified vulnerable populations.

A report focusing on disability challenges is included after the report on vulnerable, at-risk communities.



REPORT ON VULNERABLE, AT-RISK COMMUNITIES



Teens

Participants in the Teen Listening Session outlined an extensive number of needs they perceive in their community, many of those as a result of the COVID pandemic, some exacerbated by it, and some as new areas of concern. These needs reflect a focus on mental health challenges, community advocacy, resilience-building, and the importance of collaboration and communication in addressing community needs.

Prevalent Teenager Needs: Participants synthesized their insights, which included concerns regarding education, community spaces, physical and social safety protocols, LGBTQ+ and accessibility support, and mental health initiatives. The main areas of need are summarized below:

- **Community Space Challenges:** The lack or scarcity of accessible and affordable public spaces is one of the most important needs they perceive in the community, and an especially important one considering the life stage in which they are. There's an acute need for public spaces in which teenagers could gather in a safe and affordable manner; many described the existence of such spaces but with the challenge that they are not really public or free spaces, so they become financially unsustainable in the long run. This calls for the importance of creating and strengthening a sense of community in which they can explore their identities in a safe manner based on a sense of racial and cultural inclusion. This is particularly important due to the COVID pandemic's impact on emphasizing the importance of bringing people together.
- **Physical and Social Safety and Accessibility Challenges:** Related to the previous point, safety was also mentioned as an important need, emphasizing both physical and social safety. Regarding physical safety, participants mentioned the need for anonymous reporting systems for any kind of harassment or abuse, nocturnal security measures, and emergency disaster preparedness protocols. Regarding social safety, they mentioned the need for LGBTQ+ community members to get 24/7 social and peer help by creating necessary systems of support. Participants underscored the imperative of cultivating a secure and resilient community. It is important to address discrimination across diverse communities and advocate for changes in society's perceptions of others. The importance of increasing the understanding of accessibility is also part of developing a sense of safety among the community. Providing accommodations for visible and invisible disabilities and neurodivergent people is increasingly important in the City.
- **Mental Health Challenges:** Participants described mental health challenges, articulating concerns about insufficient community resources, increased awareness and education about drug effects, the need for intergenerational communication and understanding, and the lingering impact of social dynamics in the post-COVID era. They described a lack of support and understanding from parents and guardians and the need to educate them on the importance and impact of mental health challenges among teenagers. Of particular importance is to overcome generational attitudes towards mental health that discourage seeking help, and to move on from the mentality that "things will get better" or "you just have to have a positive attitude." It is of the utmost importance to develop mechanisms through which a teenager can request and get the help they need, as well as spaces in which they can reflect on their own mental health.

It is also important to note that young people are more accepting and compassionate of people with any kind of mental health struggles and overall disabilities (physical, mental, and emotional.) They feel strongly that those individuals are deserving of community support and are ready to advocate for them.

Maybe because mental health appears to be a prevalent issue among young people, and its awareness is definitely higher among them, participants stressed the importance of having fun as a way of regulating any mental health issues. This also provides a way to increase community cohesion and strengthen identities.

We're doing this and that to help support mental health at our school, but you can see that it's not actually working. So, I'd say that's why I perform. I think there just needs to be something changing the system to actually make improvements - Teen Session Participant



Resilience Points

Participants highlighted the mechanisms they observe among their peers to face the community challenges mentioned above and the values that help them overcome those challenges. They highlighted the importance of community connections and support, with an emphasis on intergenerational communication and understanding. Participants mentioned the importance of avoiding the common situation in which groups that face discrimination are charged with finding solutions, thus increasing the pressure they already face; instead, it is essential to work together as a community to find the solutions to challenges that affect everybody. Any activities or programs that highlight and emphasize a sense of community, such as collective advocacy, collaboration, and transparency, are beneficial. They are interested in working together with adults in finding the right solutions and it is important for them to have a sense of agency in the solutions of these challenges.

Any community programming targeted towards the Teen community should address the sense of communal identity that brings the community together and increases their sense of resilience.

We presented participants with a list of existing programs available to them and asked for their interest in them. We didn't indicate which of the Partner Organizations provided each program, and the program description was vague and general with the goal of eliciting reactions to the core programmatic value without necessarily skewing them based on the content. The programs that gathered the most interest were: accessibility resources and equipment, and scholarships for art classes



Parents with Young Children

Another community of focus was that of parents with young children, more specifically, children of preschool and elementary school age. One of the main findings of the needs assessment was that their needs tended to be much more “practical” or logistical than those of the other communities of focus. We listened to logistical challenges in terms of scheduling, transportation, safety in public spaces, waiting lists for popular programs, etc. Most of these needs are also associated with low-income and immigrant families, which uncovered the situation of a particularly vulnerable portion of the population.

Prevalent Parents of Young Children Needs: Participants synthesized their needs into three main categories: childcare challenges, socialization challenges, and resource information challenges.

- **Childcare Challenges:** This is one of the most important challenges for working parents due to the availability of quality childcare and the challenges associated with finding and enrolling in the right program and/or finding the right solution for their families. Some of the concerns shared by participants include extended daycare waitlists, the significance of language learning, the importance of children learning English, the safety and availability of parks and playgrounds and other age-appropriate public spaces, etc.

Many of these challenges are exacerbated when the child has any kind of learning, physical, or mental disability requiring more regular and specialized care. They described the challenges associated with these types of situations, which put a heavy burden on them as parents.

- **Enrichment Programs Challenges:** Participants also described challenges associated with opportunities for their children to socialize with other children in the community through age-appropriate programs that would stimulate their growth and also for them to participate in enrichment programs. Many described enrichment activities that are available only during working hours, limiting their opportunities to participate in them with their children, or programs available in other cities and having to travel long distances because the programs they are interested in are not available in their city or neighborhood. Their concerns are associated with the isolation experienced by most children during the lockdown phase of the COVID pandemic and the deep impact that it had on their children's social and cognitive development. Enrichment activities are necessary yet not always accessible to people in their circumstances, and they wish there were more opportunities for weekend programming, for example.

Related to these are also challenges of children with learning disabilities and/or neurocognitive differences, which include finding resources, support groups, and accessibility to appropriate programs.

- **Resource Information Challenges:** Most participants acknowledged that their primary source of information for childcare programs and resources is a simple Google search. Due to their hectic schedules, they don't have time to engage in thorough research about resources available in their communities, and the chances that the most appropriate program for them does not show up on top of their online search are high. Some participants described attending programs in nearby cities because they didn't know whether similar programs were available in their community or because those programs were conducted at times when they were at work. They wish there were more easily accessible and publicized resources.

If I wanted to find resources to assist him [their son] with any kind of disabilities he may have, where I would even go for that. So to me, knowing where these resources are, is there a place to find them having that communicated and publicized in a way that we can find it easily? That's something probably would be important and good to know - Parents Session Participant.



Resilience Points

Participants mentioned that, as parents, the main value that keeps them going and gives them strength in difficult times is the responsibility and duty they feel for their own children. They mentioned that as parents, they would do anything necessary to provide for their children, despite any challenges and their specific circumstances. This sense of responsibility makes them feel proud of themselves as parents and as individuals, and they feel a deep sense of accomplishment when they see their children thriving. They would oftentimes, if not always, put their children's needs ahead of their own needs, and they value anything, any resource or program available to them, that would help them feel they are fulfilling their sense of responsibility and duty to their children.

When presented with existing programs by Partner Organizations that would be of interest to them, participants selected a long list, including:

- Art in schools
- Dance in schools
- Community collaborations for theatre productions
- Memory loss cafe (for older caregivers)
- Medicare workshops
- Children's theatre classes
- Children's theatre productions for small audiences
- Free admission to public programs
- Accessibility resources and equipment

Note: Same as with the Teen listening session, we didn't indicate which of the Partner Organizations provided each program, and the program description was vague and general with the goal of eliciting reactions to the core programmatic value without necessarily skewing them based on the content



Seniors

While it might seem like seniors in the Palo Alto community are one of the most well-served of our populations of focus, there are sub-communities that are often overlooked and in vulnerable situations. More specifically, low-income, immigrant, non-English-speaking seniors face particular challenges such as transportation or language barriers. We also heard about other sub-communities that might be overlooked and appear “invisible” because their needs are not apparent or well-known. It is important to recognize the needs of middle-class individuals who may not fall into specific low-income assistance programs, for example.

An important challenge specific to this community is related to the effects of the pandemic, which are particularly dangerous for seniors. While many reported re-engaging in pre-pandemic activities, they remain cautious and tend to avoid large gatherings or touching surfaces in public spaces.

Prevalent Seniors Needs: Our assessment shows a wide range of community programs designed for the senior community, most of which are well-funded and attended. Yet, there are barriers to participation, such as transportation, accessibility, access to information, language barriers, program enrollment, or awareness of the needs of specific sub-communities.

- **Program Participation Challenges:** As mentioned before, the variety of programming targeting this population is great, but their participation is often limited by ways in which they can participate. Transportation is one of the most common barriers among senior citizens, and it's directly related to their participation in programs that would increase their overall physical and mental health. Along with transportation, other barriers include the cost of some programs and mobility barriers for those who have difficulty moving around. It is important also to highlight the fact that many seniors are disabled in ways that are visible or invisible to others and that this situation exacerbates the challenges they face in participating in existing programs.
- **Information Barriers Challenges:** Along with participation barriers, seniors also face the challenge of getting the right information in ways that are accessible, familiar, and relevant to them. Most acknowledge that the information they are seeking is now mostly online, and even though many are familiar with the internet and devices to access it, they also feel that sometimes it's cumbersome and wish there were other ways of getting information. Traditional communication media, such as newspapers, newsletters, flyers, mailers, etc., were mentioned with nostalgia and wishing those were still available at least some of the time. Along with information, they also mentioned the challenge to sign up online for programs or buying tickets for special events and reporting that oftentimes they struggle with those online platforms. And of course, language barriers are also insurmountable for those with limited proficiency in English and the only source of information is online.
- **Invisible Communities Challenges:** Many seniors in the community face the challenge of being overlooked based on their circumstances. Immigrant seniors with limited or no English proficiency are one example, as it is those who live in highly valued homes but on a fixed income, limiting their participation because of financial constraints.

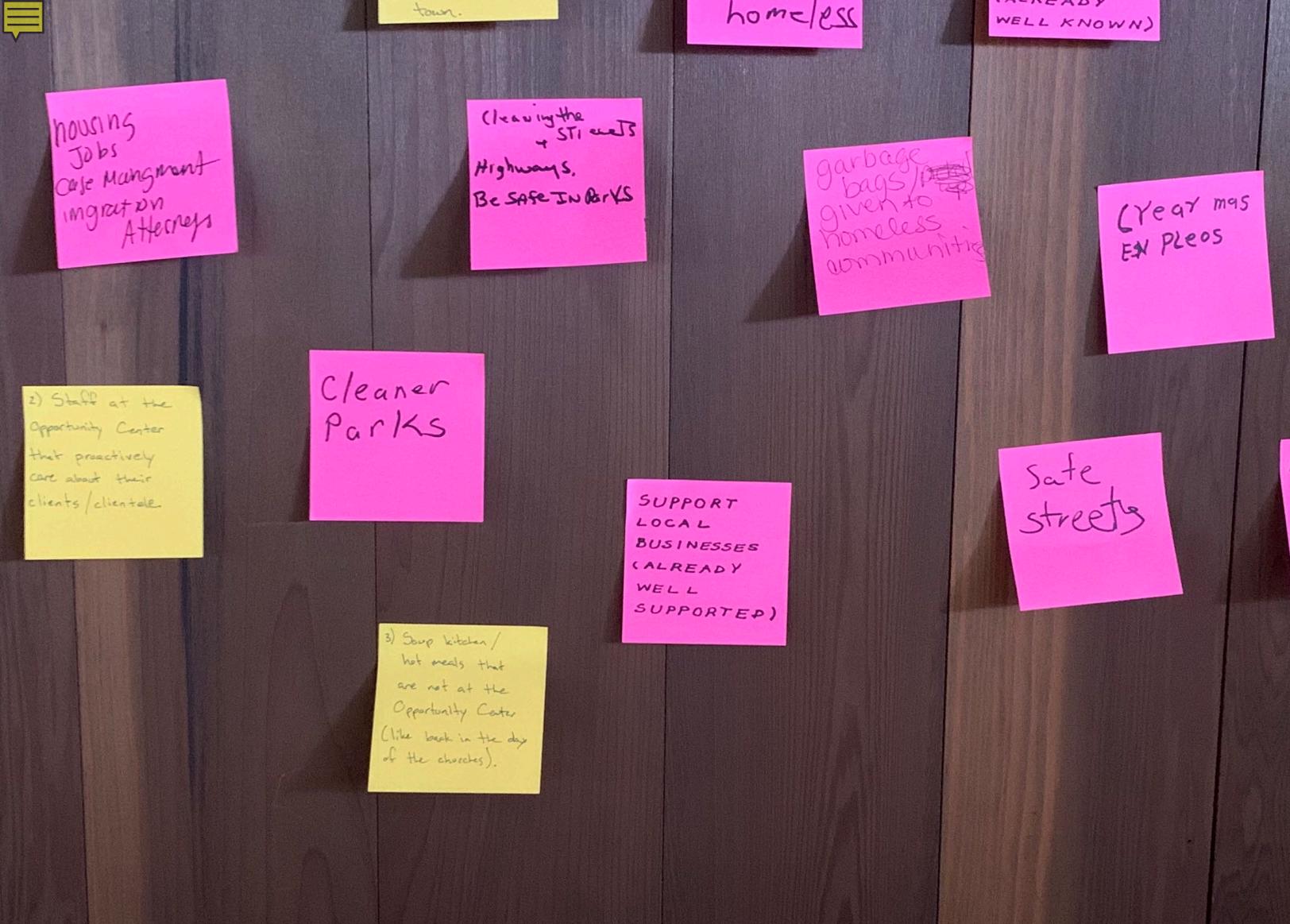
These sub-communities, and others that might not be visible, tend to go under the radar of organizations designing and providing services for this population. We should mention that seniors in these circumstances tend to isolate themselves, either for their low proficiency in English or because they don't want to appear in a situation of need, and it's therefore important to design outreach programs to identify those and understand their needs.

I think the whole notion of Palo Alto being an affluent community might be a little bit wrong. I think there's a lot of middle class people like myself, who are living here. And if you've lived here a long time, it means we bought our house a long time ago. So we can stay still stay here in this affluent community, because we own our home, but we live in a fixed income -. Seniors Session Participant



Resilience Points

Community is one of the most important and cherished experiences for seniors since oftentimes they tend to be isolated and feel that their unique needs are not known to others. While programs for seniors tend to be adequate and of quality, the main challenge resides in accessing them, and this is where connecting with others who are in similar situations and understand the particular needs becomes relevant. Seniors like to connect with others who understand and share their circumstances. This leads to interpersonal communication, which is a source of cognitive stimulation and emotional connection and is highly cherished by this community.



Housing Vulnerable

The needs of individuals who experience housing vulnerability are varied and multi-faceted. Many of their needs are related to basic human services, such as safety in the streets or access to clean food and water, while others are connected to higher-level needs, such as respect from the community or opportunities to focus on their own mental health. One of the most prevalent challenges described by participants in our listening session was an ambivalent relationship with law enforcement representatives in which some participants described situations of harassment while others recognized a significant change in how special response teams intervene in situations related to mental health challenges, particularly schizophrenia, among their peers.

Prevalent Housing Vulnerable Community Needs: Ranging from physical needs such as clean and safe public spaces to higher level needs such as mental health and respect from others, the needs of the Housing Vulnerable community are complex and interconnected. It is important to stress the need to look at this community in a holistic way and recognize the areas of opportunity to support such a vulnerable community.

- **Access to Resources Challenges:** Probably the most important challenge for these individuals is the ability to access necessary resources, especially when this challenge is compounded with others, such as those of immigrant populations or people with disabilities. Participants stressed the importance of making information about available resources widely known, which oftentimes doesn't happen. Access to jobs was highlighted as one of the most important needs, as well as clean and safe public spaces, support from local businesses, legal services, and more support for homelessness programs such as soup kitchens and case management. It is important to note that many individuals in this community are also disabled in ways that are visible to others but also in ways that are not, which compounds the challenges they already face, as well as the availability of support programs.
- **Discriminatory Practices Challenges:** Participants described numerous instances in which they experienced discriminatory practices from the community at large, with emphasis on law enforcement individuals, including situations targeting the homeless population. Participants stressed the need for legal support for those who feel powerless. These discriminatory practices are exacerbated when the targets are people with disabilities, and participants emphasized that many of those disabilities are invisible to others, such as mental disabilities.

Participants also highlighted the need to focus on the Latino/a/x Community, addressing their needs and discussing challenges related to immigration status and job opportunities.

- **Self-Care Challenges:** Among these deeply important issues, the need for self-care arose as a vital need that is frequently overlooked and in many cases impossible to address. Individuals described the importance of taking care of their own mental health, not only their physical health, and one of the most important ways to address it is by having opportunities to rest without the fear that others would disturb them. Taking care of their mental health is one of the most important needs yet oftentimes it's completely overlooked because of the urgency to fulfill other needs. Having an opportunity to relax in the middle of the day becomes precious.

I don't actually give myself the opportunity to relax. Anybody who knows me, knows that I don't relax and I'm always on like a robot with emotions. But that's a psychological state. At nighttime, I'll just sit there for hours staring. I'll sit there for hours. Housing Vulnerable Session Participant

Resilience Points

Freedom from the deep constraints of their everyday lives is one of the most important and cherished experiences individuals experiencing housing vulnerabilities crave. Taking care of themselves and having opportunities to rest and engage in spiritual practices such as meditation, mindfulness, or prayer resonate deeply among these individuals. Rest is one of the most meaningful experiences that is oftentimes overseen by those of us whose basic needs are met, yet for those who don't have access to basic needs the opportunity to relax and have a quiet time to recover and re energize is essential. Along with rest, opportunities to take care of themselves help restore their human dignity and self-respect, becoming a spiritual experience. This is probably the most important opportunity for Partner Organizations to engage this community.



Recommendations

1) Focus on what resonates most deeply with these communities. As described above, there are specific type of experiences that resonate deeply with these communities and provide a sense of resiliency and pride. Focus on evoking those experiences through specific programs and/or engagement strategies. The challenges faced by these populations are deep and varied, but what makes them overcome those struggles is what resonates the most with them.

2) Identify Intersectional subcommunities. It is apparent that some of the underserved populations included in this report share the same or similar issues. Because of this, it is important to recognize that some challenges are compounded making it difficult to identify individuals that are facing specific struggles. By adopting an intersectional approach to community outreach and engagement, it is more likely that we would be able to identify subcommunities that might appear “invisible” in some instances. One example of this is focusing on low-income or disabled individuals across all four underserved populations.

3) Respite spaces. Throughout this project, we identified the need for relaxation, meditation, or prayer spaces that are particularly relevant for housing vulnerable populations but would benefit many other groups in the community. For example, there's increasing awareness of the need of quiet spaces for neurodivergent individuals, and this is an area in which Partner Organizations could offer relevant solutions.

4) Targeted communications. It looks like for seniors and parents of young children, online communications present some challenges because of accessibility issues for the former and difficulty in finding the appropriate resources for the latter. This situation could be solved by providing opportunities for “old style” communications such as flyers, mailers, and/or posters that could be more easily targeted to the intended audiences. In general, there's a gap between the needs of all these communities, not only seniors or parents, and their awareness of available resources, which should be met by developing targeted communications.

5) City services training. Every City facility should be able to provide basic information about support services and resources for underserved populations whenever necessary. Beyond that, front desk staff should be trained on how to accommodate the needs of these populations when they are looking for moments of respite, connection, or entertainment. Take advantage of these interactions with underserved individuals to provide information about enrichment programs that could be relevant to them.





REPORT ON DISABILITY AMONG DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES



Introduction

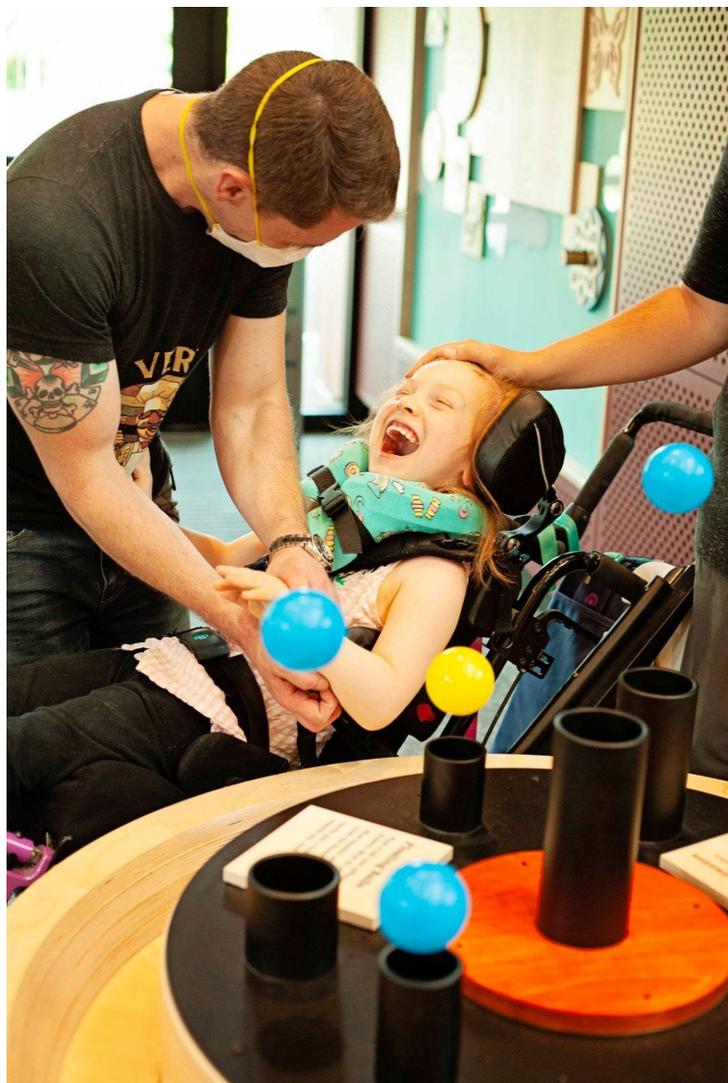
According to the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) of 1990 (ADA), an individual with a disability is a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment. Disability can be temporary or permanent, visible or invisible. It is universal and people with disabilities are members of every community. The [US Centers for Disease Control](#) estimates **26%** - or 1 in 4 – people have some type of disability. According to the American Community Survey 2022 1-year estimates, **11.7% of the civilian population in California** has a disability. In [Santa Clara](#) this number is 9.3%, and [Palo Alto](#) has 9.9% of its population identified as having a disability.

In July 2023, the [Pew Research Center](#) provided an enlightening overview of facts about people with disabilities. People with disabilities are more likely to be older, deal with issues in mobility and cognition, earn less than those without a disability, and have lower rates of technology adoption. Additionally, the rate of students receiving special education and services has increased over the last decade.

People with disabilities were much more likely to face [psychological distress during the Covid-19 pandemic](#) (66% vs 34% according to a Pew Research Center analysis).

Related to the aging population in Palo Alto and the surrounding area, according to the [US Census Quick Facts](#) for 2023 19.3% of Palo Alto residents were over the age of 65 (17.3% in the US population). The [Census Bureau's 2022 American Community Survey](#), approximately 24% of people between 65 and 74 have a disability, 46% among those 75 and older. The [Avenidas' 2022 Community Assessment Survey](#) on older adults (pp. 79) found that senior survey respondents claimed to have the following needs related to accessibility and health:

- 36% physical health
- 25% mental health
- 24% mobility



Interviews with Disability Community Members

Consultant Lisa Eriksen conducted seven interviews with a variety of members, experts, and representatives of the disability community. In addition, a listening session was held on November 6, 2023 as part of the Junior Museum & Zoo Accessibility Advisory Team meeting. These interviews and listening session were based on questions posed in the other listening sessions. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, lasted between 35 and 55 minutes, and included the following individuals:

- Consultant, writer, advocate and parent of a child with autism
- Member of Community Advisory Committee for Special Education in Palo Alto and parent of child with disabilities
- Department Director of a non-profit serving people with developmental disabilities and parent of child with disabilities
- Chief Programs Officer for non-profit serving blind and visually impaired individuals
- Services Manager for non-profit serving Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, and DeafBlind people, who is Deaf
- Art Coordinator for non-profit profit serving people with developmental disabilities
- Inclusion Support Specialist for the program, Inclusion Collaborative, of the Santa Clara County Office of Education and parent of child with disabilities



Summary of Disability Needs

A number of challenges and needs of disabled people and their families were mentioned by the interviewees. Some of these needs were unique to people with a specific disability, other needs were more universal to the disability community, and some were also mentioned by people in the other listening session groups.

People with disabilities have many similar needs to other groups interviewed in the project listening sessions. The need for socialization opportunities and connecting to community post-pandemic was mentioned most often, as well as the need for meaningful activities to enrich life, provide recreation and learning opportunities for both children and adults. More opportunities for recreation for children, teens, young adults and families are needed.

While interviewees mentioned the need for educational opportunities and life-skill training for children and young people, there is a desire for occasions for people to socialize both within their disability community and inclusion with people in the community in general. Interviewees also mentioned the importance of direct collaboration with people and organizations that support people with disabilities in developing appropriate programs and services.

Interviewees expressed the need for:

- Inclusive programs, recreation and social inclusion for adults and children. Considering both biological age and cognitive age in program design and participation.
- Programs for out-of-school (young) adults. There is also a need for teen programs.
- Special programs with support for specific disabilities. This support should include aides for people who require additional assistance.
- More and better transportation. Public transit options are limited and have not returned to pre-pandemic levels.
- Virtual and in-person options. Hybrid programming for people not able or comfortable attending programs in-person is still needed, or for people who can't get to programs due to limited transportation.
- Stronger public visibility of program offerings and accessibility options. Better marketing and easily accessible information and ability to sign up and/or purchase tickets. More visibility of community program offerings and accessibility options on City of Palo Alto website and other marketing channels.
- Job training opportunities for both teens and adults. Support for starting small businesses.
- Programs for Deaf community created and run by Deaf people. Hiring qualified Deaf individuals and involving them in programming, not just providing ASL for existing program.

Needs Identified by Specific Disability

Inclusion needs are as varied and unique as people. When discovering the needs of people with disabilities there are sometimes very diverse or conflicting desires. People with different disabilities, or sometimes the same disability, can have very diverse and unique needs. For instance, while the request for in-person social opportunities was mentioned often, some interviewees shared that people are also wanting to continue virtual program opportunities for health and/or transportation reasons.

The following summary of needs expressed during interviews is organized by disability type, but please note that there are intersectional, as well as divergent, needs within these groups. Autism is summarized as a separate needs-group because there are often unique and differing needs, but there are sometimes similarities with people with cognitive and developmental disabilities.



Developmental and Cognitive Disabilities

One interviewee spoke about the strength of Palo Alto’s diverse and accepting community, and expressed the desire for inclusive programs and activities. She noted the lack of after-school classes and summer camp programs for disabled children, particularly those with diverse support needs. She suggested the need for music, science, and dance classes designed for disabled children, as well as job training opportunities for disabled teens. Also mentioned were limited support groups and she proposed the idea of family gatherings, like JMZ’s Super Family Sundays, as a way of giving families a chance to connect. She suggests collaboration between the City of Palo Alto, school district, and service organizations to create various programs for disabled students. She shared examples of successful initiatives, such as a parent-led organization making Switch-activated toys and college students organizing activities for disabled students. As a follow up, she shared a list of organizations and programs that might provide models or collaboration to Partner Organizations (see Appendix B).

This interviewee also emphasized the challenges faced by parents during the pandemic, feeling exhausted and isolated, and the ongoing need for visible support and programs for disabled students in the community. She recommends exploring volunteer groups and programs outside Palo Alto for models, such as [Stanford's "Kids with Dreams" club](#) and San Francisco's recreational programs.

Another interviewee who works with people with developmental disabilities emphasized the importance of inclusive recreation programs and the need for facilitated socialization.

"An ongoing need that expressed itself really well in Covid, but it was ongoing before is ... recreation, but also a pullout on recreation is facilitated socialization. So, I think the ADA, during Covid ADA got even more attention and so we usually think of that as like railings, and you know things, access to bathrooms and so forth, like that. But the ADA really covers every aspect of life, and that includes access to recreation, city recreations, not just access into the building, but inclusion in services."

She mentioned the importance of training recreation staff and touched on various activities, such as board games, karaoke, crafts, outings and cooking as ways to engage and include individuals with developmental disabilities. She stated that meeting the needs of individuals with more intense disabilities may require different levels of facilitation. Collaborative efforts between cities can help to provide diverse and accessible recreation programs in different locations. The interviewee noted that the ADA covers not only physical access, but also inclusion services, especially in city recreation programs. Some cities have hired staff to ensure ADA compliance and facilitate inclusive opportunities. Individuals may require one-on-one support, which should be considered in program planning.

This interviewee also shared that after leaving school, individuals with disabilities often feel isolated and face challenges in finding social opportunities. There is a need for continued social engagement. Teen centers might play a role in providing social activities, but training for teens in facilitating interaction is essential. Strategies for effective communication about opportunities may involve reaching out to existing groups, support networks and online platforms.

One significant challenge mentioned by another interviewee was the difficulty individuals face in accessing programs due to changes in public transportation, which has been reduced post-pandemic. This affects people with disabilities' ability to participate in the art and other programs that their organization offers. This interviewee also discussed the need to maintain virtual program offerings, since these eliminate transportation barriers and allows people who are not able to attend in-person programs due to health concerns to participate. There is a trend to transition programs to all in-person post-pandemic, which is problematic for some. The interviewee also acknowledged the impact of the pandemic on children's social development and the need for supportive environments to help them readjust to in-person interactions.



She also mentioned the need for studio space and open studio time for artists, particularly for mediums like ceramics, which need dedicated space. Unfortunately, she does not have studio space available for the disabled artists in her program.

While job development services exist, this interviewee suggested expanding offerings to include building work-related skills, resume checking, and exploring career paths beyond traditional job placement, such as starting a business. It was also suggested to create social spaces specifically for adults with disabilities, acknowledging that existing general adult programming may not always be welcoming or accommodating. It is also important to provide accessible information about events, including social narratives and information about physical space to contribute to a more inclusive experience.



Autism

The interviewee, with an expertise in autism, emphasized the need for more programs to help individuals with significant disabilities, particularly after they leave high school. There are challenges to find suitable day programs and employment opportunities, and they stressed the importance of respectful and inclusive organizations. Another big challenge is funding for staffing, particularly with the current problem of depressed wages for people who work in schools and as support staff.

There are specific difficulties faced by autistic individuals with subtle disabilities, such as navigating healthcare and employment. There is a need for art programs, inclusive events, and sensory-friendly activities in institutions like the Children's Theatre, libraries, and art museums. The interviewee praised programs like a supported soccer team her child participated in, but points out the importance of inclusive training for volunteers. There is a lack of fully integrative programs, and she emphasized the significance of true inclusion in the community and suggests more activities for individuals like her child, who seeks social engagement. A model program to look at is the job training partnership between the [San Francisco Arc and Cal Academy](#).

But the other thing is that in terms of like that's kind of the difference between awareness and acceptance, like being aware of autism doesn't actually decrease stigma right, and being aware of disability. It's interaction, like time and again, we see the research that interacting with disabled people and autistic people is actually what fosters acceptance and understanding. It's the difference between, you know, theory and practice, right?

And so, anything that you could be doing that would foster like true inclusion in the community would be great. That's really crucial to the overall health of the community as well as the overall health of people with disabilities.



School-age Children with Disabilities

One interviewee works for the Santa Clara County Office of Education to promote inclusion of children with disabilities. She sees a great need for socialization opportunities and play groups, especially in inclusive settings. She also notes that childcare is a great need and mentioned the struggles parents face due to work schedules. There are challenges for parents to find programs for children, especially those with specific needs.

There are also communication gaps that make finding information difficult, and the interviewee suggested leveraging the existing network of libraries to disseminate information more effectively. One asset is the Palo Alto population is generally well educated, resilient and creative, and able to navigate systems. She also shared that she receives calls to [Inclusion Collaborative](#) from parents who were unaware of existing programs. Inclusion Collaborative has contracts and is available to consult with school districts and others to design inclusion within the schools and community. The interviewee suggested looking at other cities, like Mountain View and San Jose (“Angels on Stage”) for models of inclusive programs. There is a need for both inclusive programs and programs that are exclusive to support a specific disability. San Jose has camps that are both inclusive and camps that are specialized for certain disabilities. She sent a list of organizations and programs that might provide models or collaboration (see Appendix C).



Blind and Visually Impaired

The interviewee who works with people who are blind or have visual impairments shared the need and importance of in-person engagements, the prevalence of anxiety and depression, and the importance of collaboration with other organizations to provide inclusive opportunities and engaging experiences. She spoke about the impact of prolonged virtual interactions on children, particularly those with visual impairments. There was particularly loss of social skills, connection, and self-development during the two years of remote learning. She emphasized the need for intense support to supplement the time lost and address challenges faced by blind and visually impaired children, such as social awkwardness and extremes in communication styles.

They lost a lot of social skills development. They lost a lot of connection. They lost a lot of self-determination, growth, confidence. The whole world became through a screen, which the screens are all digitally modified. And so, I think the impact of that is not known yet. But it's, I think, a huge need for kids to get intensive help to supplement that loss of time where they had to be something that no one's ever had to do before. So, you know, drawing the kids together and the families together, and having opportunities for them to learn about emotions or identify their own emotions or, reflect on some of that time, I think, could be really helpful.

The interviewee also mentioned some specific needs of visually impaired children, including the use of magnification tools, and suggested potential programming ideas tailored to their unique requirements. She spoke about how blind and visually impaired children often struggle with feeling smaller and shrinking due to bumping into people or being bumped into. theatre program opportunities were discussed, and she mentioned that acting in a role will be a great way to allow children to practice taking up physical space and using their voice. She feels there is a positive impact of inclusive events on visually impaired children and their families and hopes that there will be more collaboration with the Partner Organizations to provide these types of programs.





Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

In this interview, facilitated by an ASL interpreter on Zoom, the interviewee discussed the importance of true inclusivity and access for the Deaf community. She emphasized the need for organizations to go beyond meeting legal requirements and truly understand the needs of Deaf individuals. She covered the need for better training and acknowledgement of access work, the challenges of interpreting services, and the importance of effective communication for Deaf individuals.

The interviewee spoke about misconception of inclusion and the need for genuine engagement and interaction with Deaf individuals. She discussed the challenges faced by the Deaf community during the pandemic, including increased isolation and communication barriers due to masks. There is a need for more effective communication for Deaf and Deafblind individuals and she spoke about the importance of tactile language and facial expressions in communication. There are challenges with interpreting services and there are limitations of video relay interpreting.

And often people bring in interpreters and sometimes that works. But with children, especially for Deaf children or even Deaf adults where English is not their first language, it's not really beneficial for them to learn from an interpreter. It's more beneficial for them to learn from a Deaf interpreter because that Deaf interpreter will know exactly how to match the language to the level of that person, to the level of the child or to the level of the needs of the person who has different language needs. So, you want to have both. It doesn't need to be one or the other in terms of a Deaf interpreter or a hearing interpreter.

The interviewee emphasized the value of having Deaf individuals involved in programming and events, rather than relying solely on interpreters. She spoke about the need for deeper engagement with the Deaf community to develop Deaf-inclusive programming and the importance of having Deaf individuals run programs and events. There also needs to be compensation for Deaf docents and she shared strategies for hiring qualified Deaf individuals. There is a need for role models and access for Deaf children. There is also a need for specific marketing materials for Deaf events, so that people know it is ASL space, not just a hearing event with an interpreter.

Using the word Deaf community to include all of the different folks who are experiencing deafness in some way, Deafblind, Deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf plus. And so, we have someone involved in that process in terms of art, have a Deaf person do the art talk or be a docent or do the tour for the exhibit, for plays. Have Deaf people involved in the play have Deaf actors doing plays in ASL only. And that is actually having Deaf people do the work and then being included in the work themselves, not just having Deaf people present.

And what's so hypocritical is that the museums often willing to pay for an ASL hearing interpreter, but they're very resistant to paying a Deaf docent. And I think, but you can offer the same access and why are you saying no to paying for a Deaf docent, but fine with paying a hearing interpreter, doesn't make sense.

The interviewee spoke about the importance of ongoing intention of why you are working with the Deaf community and not just meeting grant requirements. She said that organizations should reach out to the Deaf community for guidance and collaborate with organizations like [DCARA](#) or the [San Francisco Deaf Club](#) to ensure accessibility for children and families. She shared her appreciation for the compensation offered for participation in the interview and offered to share contacts and serve as a resource for further collaboration.





Recommendations for Meeting the Needs of People with Disabilities

Most interviewees noted that the Partner Organizations are already doing good work to serve people with disabilities. Yet, all interviewees stated that much more can be done to serve the needs of the disability community. For example, specific programs mentioned included:

- Sensory theatre experiences for members of the autism community
- Recreation opportunities for teens and young adults with developmental disabilities where they can just “hang out” and socialize
- Museum docent programs created and hosted by Deaf docents for the Deaf community.

A full list of specific program suggestions made by interviewees and listening session participants is available in Appendix D.

To create a healthy and just community, organizations serving the public must promote robust inclusion. Too often, service providers focus on meeting the minimal standards of the ADA, without considering broader needs. People with and without disabilities are in the public sphere partaking in services. They are attending events, visiting facilities, taking classes, etc. A consultant on the VSA International listserv recently shared their pragmatic approach by asking clients “How hard do you want your customers to work to obtain/use your goods and services?” They went on to state, “There is no ‘them’ and ‘the others’. There is no ‘special consideration’. There is simply effectively interacting with the customer.” Yet, we need to go beyond thinking about people with disabilities only as paying customers, and embrace the intrinsic value of disabled people in public life.

Fortunately, much good inclusion work is already being done in Palo Alto, such as the Children’s theatre productions with Angels on Stage and the Magical Series productions, the Art Center’s variety of accessible resources and equipment and recent *Art of Disability Culture* exhibition, and the Memory Café at the Library. I would like to make the following recommendations to help meet the needs related to disability outlined in this report:

1) Include advisors from the community. Tina Keegan, Exhibits Director at the Palo Alto Junior Museum & Zoo, is an experienced accessibility champion and is willing to help advise others in how to do innovative inclusion work.

Tina was the project director for the *Access from the Ground Up* project, which was funded by a \$270,000 grant from Institute of Museum and Library Services in 2018. This grant funded accessible exhibits and features in the new JMZ facility, an Accessibility Coordinator, and professional development for staff. This project serves as a national model for inclusion and was recognized through a 2023 LEAD Community Asset Award from The Kennedy Center for its accessibility work.

Much of the *Access from the Ground* project’s success was due to the contributions of an ongoing JMZ Accessibility Advisory Team. These advisors from the disability community generously contributed time, ideas, opinions, and connections. Outcomes and impact of the *Access from the Ground Up* project, including information on the Advisory Team, can be reviewed in the [Access from the Ground Up Summative Evaluation Report](#).

We had representatives from the hearing-impaired community, people whose children live with autism. We had visual impairments, mobility impairments, and it was so exciting to see so many people committed to building a curriculum and an environment that was welcoming to everyone. JMZ Accessibility Advisor

The Accessibility Advisory Team members have expressed interest in expanding their service and advising the other Partner Organizations. They are a group that works well together and knows how to provide helpful advice. I hope the Art Center, Children's theatre, and Library take advantage of this amazing group.

They listened to what we had to say. When we'd come back the next month, they would've changed things according to what we suggested. We knew that our opinions and our ideas were valued. JMZ Accessibility Advisor

It would be advisable for the City of Palo Alto to adopt this model and form its own Disability Advisory Group. They may wish to look at the new [Santa Clara County's Advisory Group](#) as a model.

2) Continue to support and grow partnerships. It is important to foster partnerships for the long-term to form authentic relationships. Advisors for the JMZ *Access from the Ground Up* project are not only readily available to give guidance, they provide marketing opportunities that would not have otherwise been available. They also help with networking to find new connections with groups and individuals.

3) Include Funds in All Budgets for Inclusion. Compensate your accessibility advisors and consultants for their time and expertise. Make sure to include funds in every project budget for ASL interpreters or hiring any equipment or professionals needed to support inclusion.

4) Work with Other Cities and Counties. Part of the research for this report included looking at what inclusion supports other cities, particularly those in Santa Clara County and the Bay Area, are providing to their communities. The focus when examining cities was on program and recreational offerings and support, as well as inclusion commitments and initiatives undertaken. A number of these cities were mentioned by the interviewees as offering programs and supports for people with disabilities.

4) Work with Other Cities and Counties. Part of the research for this report included looking at what inclusion supports other cities, particularly those in Santa Clara County and the Bay Area, are providing to their communities. The focus when examining cities was on program and recreational offerings and support, as well as inclusion commitments and initiatives undertaken. A number of these cities were mentioned by the interviewees as offering programs and supports for people with disabilities.

All cities reviewed have policies relating website and building construction ADA compliance (ADA Transition Plans), as required by law. A number have programs where libraries offer home delivery of books to house-bound people with disabilities and recreational programs for people over 50 years of age, without any specific mention of disability access (see notes of this review in Appendix E).

One city that is doing good work and was commended by several interviewees is San Jose. While they have a larger population and budget, they could be a good model and perhaps partner for Palo Alto to work with in future. San Jose has adopted a [Disability Inclusion Pledge](#) in May 2023. They have a comprehensive [Organizational Disability Assessment report](#), which provides good information on disability, terminology and language, as well as a model for other cities. On their website they provide easily accessible information on their [Disability Access Programs and Services](#), including [Therapeutic Recreation Services](#), offering classes, sports, arts, staff training and a number of other supports.

Santa Clara County has committed to inclusion work and has adopted a [Disability Inclusion Equity Pledge](#). It would make sense to connect with them to support future access work and programming.

5) Staff Training is Not Optional. If staff are not trained in the fundamentals of inclusion of people with disabilities, they will not feel knowledgeable or comfortable serving them. Training by people with disabilities is ideal. Funding and time need to be budgeted to conduct staff training. Tina Keegan of the JMZ would be happy to share resources developed for staff training and give advice and connections.

We do not 'do' inclusion 'for' people with disabilities. Rather, it is incumbent upon us to figure out how all the things we do can be inclusive. - Lisa Friedman

Disability only becomes a tragedy for me when society fails to provide the things we need to lead our lives—job opportunities or barrier-free buildings, for example. It is not a tragedy to me that I'm living in a wheelchair. - Judy Huemann

Appendix A

Community organizations consulted in the preliminary environmental scan:

1. Avenidas
2. Alta Housing
3. Stevenson House
4. Youth Community Services
5. Downtown Streets Team
6. Peninsula Healthcare Connections
7. Project Safety Net
8. Palo Alto Community Fund
9. Canopy
10. Santa Clara County – Youth and Families
11. Palo Alto University
12. Peninsula Child Care

Appendix B

Interview follow up resources from Yuri Chang – November 3, 2023

I compiled organizations' websites that provide recreational activities, disability support groups, and volunteer groups. These might help brainstorm recreational programs and activities for disabled people & their families. Please see below. I am very excited about the Valley Medical Foundation funding and our city's movement toward building a more accommodating environment for disabled communities. As I said during the meeting, PAUSD has many resources and specialists supporting disabled students, and they always welcome close collaboration with the city. Please let me know if you want to get connected with them. Our adapted physical education teachers are skilled in providing accessible sports lessons to disabled students. Their information is below.

Thanks!

Yuri

*PAUSD

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/roxanne-koopman-010086191>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/angel-sheridan-3590b134>

<https://palaltoonline.com/news/2023/05/19/special-olympics-brings-students-together-for-sports-and-smiles>

<https://www.patch.pausd.org/about-us>

<https://www.pausd.org/student-supports/special-education/team>

*organizations, volunteer groups, and adaptive recreational programs

<https://disabilityculture.georgetown.edu/about-us/>

<https://med.stanford.edu/neurodiversity.html>

<https://instagram.com/mydisabilityroadmap?igshid=OGQ5ZDc2ODk2ZA==>

<https://instagram.com/aacforall?igshid=OGQ5ZDc2ODk2ZA==>

<https://wemovetogether.ca/about-the-book/>

<https://www.keensanfrancisco.org/>

<https://cardinalservice.stanford.edu/opportunities/kids-dreams>

<https://youthcommunityservice.org/>

<https://www.bestbuddies.org/california/programs/>

<https://www.collegeofadaptivearts.org/>

<https://bit.ly/3QMvxGx>

<https://rainbowmusictherapy.com/index.html>

<https://viaservices.org>

<https://sharedadventures.org>

<https://www.riekes.org/fitness-athletic-performance-classes>

<https://menlopark.gov/Venues/Arrillaga-Family-Gymnastics-Center>

https://www.egovlink.com/menlopark/rd_classes/class_list.aspx?categoryid=58

(I heard Menlo Park City runs an adaptive gym program for disabled kids)

*Union City's AAC awareness program (October)

AAC Awareness Month celebration at Union City Library:

"Program coordinator Sabena D'Souza said 'We at "Storytime with AAC" wanted to share a few pics of our program. Dr. Dukhovny read your book and all the kids and families loved it!'

The second image is the Storytime with AAC October (AAC Awareness month) programming at Union City Library.

A little more about Storytime with AAC -

"Storytime with AAC" aims to support families/caregivers of AAC users in demonstrating language on their child's AAC device, along with developing a love for reading and building language through shared interaction and connection. This program is conducted by graduate students in the Speech-Language Pathology program at Cal State East Bay.

Who Can Attend? This program is designed for emergent communicators four years old and up (emergent communicators are new/existing AAC users who typically communicate with single words). Open to children of all abilities!

To register for the October 28th event, head to <https://bit.ly/storytime-with-AAC>
For questions or additional accommodations, please contact Polina

November 10, 2023

I just remembered that CAC invited Prof. Jihyun Lee at SJSU for adaptive exercise and sports presentation last February. She also runs weekly adapted exercise programs for disabled children at SJSU. Due to the commute and traffic, we don't go there but I heard from my friends in San Jose that it is a great program. She will be a great resource in developing recreational programs. Please see below for more information on her.

Thanks!

Yuri

<https://www.sjsu.edu/kinesiology/about-us/faculty-and-staff.php>

Appendix C

Interview follow up resources from Susan Larkin – November 16, 2023

Susan Larkin, PhD
Inclusion Collaborative Warmline Specialist
Santa Clara County Office of Education

I'm so glad we were able to chat this morning. Here are links to other organizations that might be helpful:

1. [Angels on Stage](#)—they put on several programs and plays during the year. They would be a great resource for the children's theatre , though the Angels on Stage programs are specifically for people with disabilities. I would contact [Marcie Turner](#) for more information about Angels on Stage.
2. [San Jose Community Centers](#)
 - a. have an inclusive policy for all of their programs. This statement is on the inside cover of all of the community center brochures.

INCLUSION POLICY

The City of San José, Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) encourages and supports the participation of individuals with all ability levels in programs and services. To facilitate opportunities for people with and without disabilities and to engage in leisure pursuits together, PRNS provides inclusion support services. These services include, but are not limited to interpreters for the deaf or hearing consideration of the requested accommodation, is provided at least two weeks in advance. For more information on inclusion opportunities, specialized recreation services and accommodations, please contact Therapeutic Services at (408) 369-6438.

- a. They also has programs [specifically for people with disabilities through All Access Sports](#)

1. San Jose Libraries
 - a. Inclusive Storytime—pre COVID every branch had an inclusive storytime. Now, I think it's just the Camden Branch.
 - b. [Insiders Club](#)—had storytime, speakers, and arts/crafts activities for adults with disabilities.
2. Santa Clara City used to have a strong Therapeutic Recreation Services (TRS) with an inclusion policy and separate classes for people with disabilities. However, it looks like this program disappeared in 2020.
3. We talked about Magical Bridges and programs that they sometimes have at their parts. Another group that you might want to talk to is [Friends of Children with Special Needs](#), which has programs in San Jose and Fremont. Their East Bay program includes a [social play group](#).
4. Stanford University – Not linking with them for research but rather through their support groups, letting families know what resources are available
 - a. [Autism](#)
 - b. [Down Syndrome](#)
5. Lucile Packard Children's –working with [Genetics](#) or [Social Services](#). These departments might be the first programs that let families know about their children's disabilities and that offer them resources. They might understand what resources parents need initially. They also could distribute lists of resources for families.

Appendix D

Junior Museum and Zoo Accessibility Advisory Team Listening Session – November 6, 2023

NEEDS IDENTIFIED

Timely public transportation
Public transportation to activities
Accessibility and mobility around the Bay Area, hard to get places
More ability for transportation
Job opportunities
Work experience for teens with disabilities
Deal with information silos and gaps
Database of resources – school, library, transportation, parks, community aids
More languages, not just Spanish, Chinese, Hindi
Housing
Child care programs
Informal education opportunities (especially targeted for folks with development disabilities)
Programming for adults, not just children
Socialization opportunities
More mental health understanding (not just talk, action)
Accessible play spaces and inclusion activities for all
Opportunities to gather and build community
Meet other parents whose child has a disability
Interest groups not just focused on social skills (curriculum), but provide a space peer group and leaders can provide social lessons. Not only for disabled kids.
Help children with social confidence
People are feeling isolated
Building community
Young children need to learn social skills outside of family/social anxiety
Support for younger kids to free play in their neighborhood
Programs for families with disabilities, including aids at camp programs
Support for families who need fulltime in-house aids
Facilitated social activities for specific ages (developmental disability)

PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS

Collaborative sponsored by First 5 for ages 0-13 – Help Me Grow

Library - inclusive story time (work with Inclusion Collaborative)

Library – program for adults, like Insiders Club run by San Jose Library

Children's theatre – work with Angels on Stage to develop a program

Develop Inclusion Statement like San Jose

Bring on an Inclusion Specialist to help support inclusion and develop disability programming

Build inclusive childcare workforce through trainings (inclusive classroom profile and Center on Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning)

Grassroots Social Media campaigns – Parents share photos and videos, modern “word of mouth”

Busing so kids and families can come to places they would not be able to visit.

Fund more teachers at the JMZ to go out and do more programs and schools and living facilities

Community support groups so families can connect

“Get outside and make a neighborhood friend” campaign

Safe bike routes in neighborhood for kids

Opportunities for kids to play without parents to foster independence

JMZ summer camps desperately need aids to support some kids' success and support staff

theatre programs that incorporates non-disabled and persons who have a disability, including developmental disability

Acapella signing programs (with rhythm)

Freestyle arts and crafts

Karaoke

Fun recreational activities – musical chairs, bean bag toss, basketball, etc.

Studio programs where adults with disabilities could paint/sculpt, etc. and socialize

Art business classes/small business classes targeted to people with disabilities

Classes for young people to learn what they can do when they are out of school

Create interest groups

- Junior Archaeologist Club
- Musical theatre about science/climate, etc. themes
- Book discussion groups at Library
- Junior Health Science Club
- Climate Science Junior Auxiliary
- Native Plant Gardeners (can volunteer with local Ohlone groups)
- Maker space

theatre for kids with disabilities

Accessible performances – audio description for blind, ASL, etc.

Library collections in braille

Wheelchair accessible spaces

Library story time in small groups for kids with disabilities

Playgroups for inclusion

Work experience for kids with disabilities

Streamlining and improving accessibility of admission/sign up processes

No string inclusive events for affinity groups

More collaborative programs/activities to encourage children/families to speak with people outside their group (free workshops/crafting sessions might facilitate this)

Events that are marketed as a way to meet other families, either broadly or community- or needs-specific

Having a safe place for homeless to talk and implement ideas to get them into housing (not just provide a home or room)

SUGGESTED ORGANIZATIONS AND PEOPLE TO CONNECT WITH

Financial Aid and Housing Insecure

Sunnyvale Community Services

West Valley Community Services –

Somos Mayfair (San Jose)

Amigos de Guadalupe Center for Justice and Empowerment (San Jose)

Santa Clara County Office of Supportive Housing

Disability General

Silicon Valley Independent Living Center

Parents Helping Parents

Developmental Disability

Hope Services

Neurodiversity

Pragnya

Appendix E

Notes on Supports and Staff Positions of Other Cities and Counties Offer for People with Disabilities

Santa Clara Co.

Santa Clara County

Santa Clara County Office of Disability Affairs

Santa Clara County Disability Pledge

Community Disability Advisory Group starting January 2024

San Jose

Priority for City with an Organizational Disability Assessment report, which provides good information on disability, terminology and language, as well as a model for other cities.

And 2023 adoption of San Jose City Disability Inclusion Pledge

They have a page of information on Disability Access Programs and Services

Including Therapeutic Recreation Services, offering classes, sports, arts, staff training and a number of other supports.

In the City Manager's office there is a Disabilities Affair Officer and an ADA Coordinator

Library program for IDD adults

Mountain View

Parents Listening Session – woman mentioned mother from PA travels to Mountain View for FREE senior programs

They do not appear to have any efforts for accessibility for people with disabilities beyond library delivery program and updating the website.

Santa Clara City

City has an [Americans with Disability Act \(ADA\) Committee](#) that meets as needed to advise Santa Clara City on disability issues. Members are comprised of community individuals and organizations such as [VIA Rehabilitation Hearing Loss Association of America](#) and the [Silicon Valley Independent Living Center](#). Nothing regarding ADA staffing, programming or any specialized support offerings.

Cupertino

Has a Teen advisory commission. Nothing regarding ADA staffing, programming or any specialized support offerings.

Sunnyvale

City has both an [advisory committee on Accessibility, one for Teens and an Age-friendly advisory committee](#). Nothing regarding ADA staffing, programming or any specialized support offerings.

Los Altos

Has Senior and Youth Advisory Commissions. Conducted [recent survey for 50+ old citizens](#) to renew its Age-Friendly Community designation, with a focus on aging in place. Nothing regarding ADA staffing, programming or any specialized support offerings.

Milpitas

Has Senior and Youth Advisory Commissions. Nothing regarding ADA staffing, programming or any specialized support offerings.

San Mateo Co.

[Has a Commission on Disabilities](#)

San Mateo

Has Senior and Youth Advisory Commissions. Nothing regarding ADA staffing, programming or any specialized support offerings.

Redwood City **Equity Plan 2021**

Accessible Recreation:

Afternoon and Evening classes (exercise, bowling, cooking, etc.) look to be offered. Appears that the general Rec Coordinator is the contact for classes.

Library Accessibility (basic)

Foster City

Teen Drop In Center – [The Vibe](#) – not necessarily for disabilities, but interesting for youth.

San Bruno

[Social Connection for Special Needs](#) program to promote social skills and to build friendships for teens and adults with disabilities. They provide several recreational and leisure activities for the participants, including arts and crafts, sports games, table games, parties, and live bands.

They have a [Senior Advisory Board](#) to make recommendations to the City of San Bruno on programs and activities. Fun activities and resource information.

Other CA

Culver City, CA

Sent out [Public Survey](#) on services for people with disabilities.

Does not appear to have an accessibility staff member

Has [Disability Advisory Committee](#) - 9 members, 4-year term

I reached out to them via email but they could not talk to me due to legal issues?

Parks, Recreation & Community Services (PRCS) Department

Senior, Social & Disability Services Division

The primary mission of the Senior, Social & Disability Services Division, a multi-service agency, is to provide a variety of educational, recreational and social services that meet the needs and interests of seniors, residents with disabilities and members of the general community. The numerous programs and services offered provide access to information and support as well as opportunities for participation in activities that lead to personal growth and enrichment.

Provides dinners and dances for adults with developmental disabilities. They did an “Abilities Carnival and Resource Fair 2023” in October. Fun activities and resource information.

City of Irvine, CA

City of [Irvine Disability Services](#) provides support to individuals with sensory, physical, or cognitive disabilities, and their family members, in the Irvine community. Support services include social recreational programming, inclusion and accommodation support, and resources and referrals. The City's Disability Services program provides social recreational programs, support services and advocacy for person with disabilities, their caregivers and providers who live or work in Irvine. Services include social events, access reporting, sensitivity training, resources and referrals, inclusion and accommodations.

[Accommodation and Inclusion Support](#) - Accommodation services for those who qualify are offered to assist persons with disabilities participating in City of Irvine classes, activities, and programs. This includes temporary 1:1 inclusion support, modification of equipment, or modification of other methods resulting in making the City's services readily accessible and usable.

“Please note: Due to staff availability and the social and recreational programs we are currently running, our 1:1 inclusion support is not a service we are in the position to provide. We understand that this is frustrating and appreciate your patience during this time. We are happy to provide other 1:1 inclusion support program resources and connect with other City park sites to help with any accommodations or modifications requested. “

Has classes and activities specifically through Disability Services - [Fall Newsletter](#)

Has [Disability Advisory Board](#)

Looks like no staff person. Main contact Community Services Supervisor for the Advisory Board

Raleigh, NC

[Specialized Recreation and Inclusion Services - a number of rec offerings specifically for disabled](#)

Position - [Accessibility Educator and Inclusion Strategist](#)

Additional post from Access LEAD listserv on [job description](#) from Raleigh, NC

