

Inland Regional Center Police/Crisis Interaction Focus Groups (Listening Sessions) and Survey Report

Disclaimer: The research, data collection, and recommendations are not intended to bypass or compromise officer safety protocols when responding to a crisis call.

Inland Regional Center (IRC) collaborates closely with the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department on its Blue Envelope and Safe Return Programs. Our partnership emphasizes the importance of seeking feedback from individuals most affected in the Intellectually and Developmentally Disabled (I/DD) Community. Furthermore, IRC's Training and Development Department has been engaged in Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) for 8 years, working with the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department and San Bernardino County Department of Behavioral Health to train recent academy graduates on I/DD awareness.

About Inland Regional Center

Inland Regional Center (IRC) serves as a platform for individuals with developmental disabilities in the Inland Empire to achieve greater independence. Since its establishment as a non-profit agency in 1972, IRC has been providing support to individuals with intellectual disabilities, autism, cerebral palsy, and epilepsy. Currently, IRC offers case management and service coordination to more than 51,000 clients in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, supported by a team of over 1200 dedicated staff members (IRC,2024).

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a concerning surge in police interactions involving individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) (Betsinger & Herritt, 2019). Unfortunately, these encounters can escalate due to a lack of awareness about

disabilities among Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs), potentially leading to arrests or even fatalities (Diamond & Hogue, 2023). According to a report by the Ruderman Family Foundation, individuals with disabilities are more than seven times more likely to experience police violence compared to those without disabilities (Perry, 2016). These alarming figures underscore a pressing need for enhanced training and awareness within law enforcement and crisis intervention agencies to engage and de-escalate situations involving individuals with disabilities effectively.

Within San Bernardino and Riverside counties, over 52,500 individuals have been identified with an I/DD and receive case management services from Inland Regional Center (IRC) (IRC, 2024). Moreover, an estimated 10,000 or more individuals with I/DD, notably Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), reside in both counties. However, for various reasons, they do not access services provided by IRC.

Previous studies have shown that a significant portion of individuals within disabled communities harbor distrust toward law enforcement and hold negative views based on their past interactions with police officers. However, police officers who have undergone disability sensitivity training tend to exhibit greater confidence in their interactions with disabled individuals (Vega & Peacock, 2023). Furthermore, studies suggest that as police officers gain more experience with the disabled community during their on-duty assignments, their confidence in interacting with disabled individuals increases (Perfecta & Glaser, 2023).

In contemporary society, understanding the experiences and perspectives of individuals with I/DD is essential for fostering inclusivity and ensuring their rights and

needs are adequately met (Aguis, 2024). Considering this objective, IRC embarked on an extensive research initiative aimed at gathering insightful perspectives from members and caretakers within this community. Our researchers were particularly interested in investigating their encounters with law enforcement and crisis intervention teams, with the goal of fostering comprehension and facilitating beneficial transformations in these pivotal domains. Additionally, our study delves into how caregivers navigate the process of seeking assistance from their designated Regional Center Services Coordinator (SC), as highlighted in both our focus groups and surveys.

One of the primary methodologies employed in our research initiative was the utilization of virtual focus groups. These focus groups served as dynamic platforms for open and candid discussions, allowing participants to share their lived experiences, challenges, and suggestions in a supportive environment. By harnessing the power of collective dialogue, we sought to capture diverse perspectives and narratives, thereby painting a comprehensive picture of the complex interactions between individuals with I/DD and law enforcement or crisis intervention personnel. Moreover, in conjunction with the focus groups, we designed a complementary survey to delve further into the nuances of these interactions.

This multifaceted approach allowed us to investigate the lived experiences of individuals within the I/DD community, shedding light on the challenges encountered during interactions with these entities. Through this methodology, we endeavored to capture a holistic understanding that encompasses the diverse perspectives and realities

within the I/DD community. This understanding will inform more effective strategies for improving these interactions and promoting greater inclusivity and safety for all involved.

At the heart of our research lies a commitment to amplifying the voices of individuals and caregivers within the I/DD community. We recognize the significance of their lived experiences and believe that their perspectives are invaluable in shaping policies, procedures, and practices that affect their daily lives.

Statement of Support for the I/DD Community

Inland Regional Center expresses solidarity with individuals who have lost their lives due to encounters with law enforcement, as well as with their families. Recognizing the profound pain, grief, and systemic injustices underlying these tragedies is essential. We are dedicated to promoting positive transformation within law enforcement, crisis intervention practices, and the Regional Center System of Care. This commitment extends to addressing issues of bias, unwarranted use of force, and perceptions of inadequate accountability. Every individual deserves to experience a sense of safety and protection from those entrusted with their well-being. We pledge ongoing support for initiatives striving towards genuine justice and equality for all.

Statement for Law Enforcement

In our unwavering commitment to the safety and well-being of all individuals, we emphasize the critical need for law enforcement officers to receive comprehensive training and preparation in interacting with individuals with I/DD. While we wholeheartedly support and appreciate the dedicated service of law enforcement officers, we also recognize the

demanding nature of their duties and the significant efforts they make in upholding public safety.

It is imperative that police officers are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively communicate and de-escalate situations involving individuals with I/DD. By fostering a deeper understanding of these disabilities and implementing appropriate strategies, law enforcement agencies can ensure that encounters are handled with sensitivity and respect, ultimately promoting the safety of everyone involved.

Furthermore, we advocate for collaborative research initiatives aimed at identifying areas for improvement in interactions between law enforcement personnel and individuals with I/DD. Through rigorous examination of past incidents and the development of evidence-based best practices, we can enact beneficial changes that serve the interests of both individuals with disabilities and law enforcement officers. By prioritizing ongoing training, research, and collaboration, we can work towards creating safer and more inclusive communities where individuals with I/DD are treated with dignity and understanding and where law enforcement personnel are empowered to serve and protect all members of society effectively.

Case Studies

Case studies play a pivotal role in police interaction research, offering invaluable insights into the complex dynamics of law enforcement interactions. It is crucial to emphasize that case studies are not intended to assign blame or pass judgment but to serve as catalysts for critical reflection and informed action. Moreover, case studies serve

as compelling evidence for additional research, training, and policy change within law enforcement. They underscore the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in an ever-evolving sociocultural landscape. In essence, case studies serve as powerful tools for driving positive change. They illuminate the complexities of policing realities, advocate for systemic improvements, and ultimately contribute to advancing law enforcement practices that uphold the principles of accountability, professionalism, and community engagement.

Kenneth French

On June 14, 2019, an off-duty police officer opened fire in a Costco store located in Corona, California. The shooting occurred following an altercation involving the off-duty police officer, his family, and an intellectually disabled man named Kenneth French. French, a non-verbal individual with I/DD, was accompanied by his parents, Russell and Paola French, at the time of the incident (Fabian, 2023).

According to accounts provided by witnesses and the French family, the altercation began when Kenneth French allegedly pushed or shoved the off-duty police officer without provocation. The exact nature of the encounter remains disputed, with conflicting narratives regarding who initiated the physical contact (Medina, 2021). It is important to note that Kenneth French's cognitive disabilities may have influenced his behavior and response to the situation. In response to the perceived threat, the off-duty police officer drew his firearm and fired multiple rounds, fatally shooting Kenneth French and injuring his parents (Fabian, 2023; Medina, 2021). The shooting resulted in Kenneth's death at the scene and left his parents hospitalized with serious injuries.

Arnaldo Rios Soto

Arnaldo Rios Soto, a young man with Autism, became the focal point of national attention following an encounter with law enforcement in North Miami, Florida, in 2016. The incident unfolded when Rios wandered away from his group home, holding only a toy truck. Mistakenly perceived as a threat, police officers responding to a call about an armed man engaged Rios. Despite the absence of any real weapon, officers fired at Rios, escalating a situation that should have been handled with care and understanding (Musa, 2022). Charles Kinsey, Soto's support worker, was on the ground near Soto with his hands raised, continuously reassuring the officers that Soto was not a threat. Despite Kinsey's pleas, one of the officers fired their weapon, injuring Kinsey in the leg (Pattini & Quinn, 2018).

Ethan Saylor

Ethan Saylor, a 26-year-old man with Down syndrome, died during a confrontation with off-duty officers in a movie theater. On January 12, 2013, Ethan saw "Zero Dark Thirty" at a local theater. After the movie ended, Ethan wished to watch it again but had not purchased an additional ticket. When the theater staff asked him to leave or buy another ticket, Ethan became upset and refused to leave his seat. The situation escalated when off-duty police officers working as security guards at the theater intervened.

Despite pleas from Ethan's support worker, the officers attempted to remove him from the theater forcibly. In the struggle, Ethan was restrained in a prone position on the

ground, which led to positional asphyxia. Ethan experienced respiratory distress and ultimately died from asphyxiation (Greenspan, 2013).

Aggressive Behavior

When it comes to individuals with I/DD, it is critical to recognize that aggressive behavior is often unintentional. Instead of solely focusing on the individual, addressing the behavior through appropriate support and intervention strategies is more effective. This approach promotes positive outcomes for both the individual and their surrounding environment. Aggressive behavior in individuals with I/DD is a complex issue that warrants attention due to its significant impact on the individual, their caregivers, and society at large. Research suggests that aggressive behavior is more prevalent among individuals with I/DD compared to the general population, with estimates indicating that up to 50% of individuals with I/DD exhibit some form of aggression (Smith et al., 2022). This behavior can manifest in various forms, including physical aggression, such as hitting or biting; verbal aggression, such as yelling or swearing; and property destruction.

Several factors contribute to the occurrence of aggressive behavior in individuals with I/DD. One major factor is communication difficulties, as many individuals with I/DD may struggle to express their needs and emotions effectively, leading to frustration and subsequent aggression (Brosnan & Healy, 2011). Additionally, sensory sensitivities, social skills deficits, and environmental stressors can further exacerbate aggressive behavior in this population (Cage & Whiteman, 2019). Understanding the root causes of aggression in individuals with I/DD is crucial for law enforcement, crisis teams, and Regional Center SC's. This comprehension enables the development of effective interventions and support

strategies to manage these behaviors, ultimately enhancing the individual's quality of life while ensuring the safety of both the individual and the officers involved.

Previous Studies by IRC and Autism Society Inland Empire (ASIE)

The Autism Society Inland Empire (ASIE) and IRC collaborated in 2023 on a focus group for family members dealing with crisis behaviors in teens or adults. A challenge exacerbated by the complexities of intersecting systems, including local school districts, Regional Centers, Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) services, mental health providers, medical doctors, and health insurance companies, particularly intensified after COVID-19.

Even though IRC consistently participates in the National Core Indicator (NCI), which provides quantitative data, the intricacies specific to the region served by IRC and ASIE are frequently overlooked by NCI data. Recognizing the limitations of this data, ASIE and IRC sought to gather qualitative insights through the focus group, understanding that such data provides a deeper understanding of the issues at hand from those directly impacted. The initiative was prompted by ASIE's survey in September 2022, which highlighted the inadequacies in capturing the depth of the crisis behavior issues faced by families, including challenges in accessing medical or behavioral health services.

The focus group aimed to foster a non-threatening environment for families to share their experiences and suggest resourceful solutions across multiple systems. By collecting person-centered qualitative data, the focus group provided IRC and ASIE with invaluable insights to develop innovative solutions and enhance support across service systems. The

findings of the focus group comprised of parents with children or family members having I/DD shed light on significant challenges within the support system for individuals facing crisis behaviors at home. These behaviors ranged from self-injury and eloping to raging tantrums and physical aggression. Participants expressed frustration with various aspects of the support system, including law enforcement, crisis response teams, mental health services, and the Regional Center System of Care.

Analysis of the focus group discussions revealed three overarching themes: a lack of appropriate person-centered pre-crisis intervention, inadequate services during crises, and systemic failures alongside a dearth of outcome data. To address these concerns, several short-term and long-term recommendations were proposed. In the short term, actions included the recommendation of compiling lists of ABA providers for adults with severe behavior, setting clear expectations for SC's during crises, proactively contacting families in crisis, creating informational pamphlets for law enforcement involvement, and providing training and resources for caseworkers and families.

In the long term, efforts were suggested to formulate specific outcome measures and collect statewide data, update processes for Community Crisis Homes, explore funding for crisis response units tailored to the I/DD community, and collaborate on resource pamphlets for dealing with violence in the home. These recommendations aimed to rectify the identified shortcomings in the support system, ensuring a more person-centered approach, better access to services during crises, and improved systemic responses to the needs of individuals with I/DD and their families.

Objective of the Survey and Multiple Focus Groups

IRC's mission is to cultivate environments that are not only inclusive and supportive but also deeply respectful, placing the rights and well-being of individuals with I/DD at the forefront. IRC is committed to fostering communities where every person, regardless of their abilities, feels valued, empowered, and fully included. Through advocacy, education, and collaboration, we endeavor to promote a culture of understanding and acceptance where the unique strengths and perspectives of individuals with I/DD are celebrated and embraced. IRC's ultimate goal is to create a society where everyone can thrive and contribute meaningfully, free from discrimination or barriers to participation.

Virtual Focus Groups

Disclaimer: IRC actively promotes involvement from the I/DD community in public input meetings, focus groups, Board of Trustees meetings, and surveys to ensure their voices, thoughts, and opinions are heard and considered when advocating for programs or crafting policies.

The six virtual focus groups provided a platform for participants to exchange their real-life experiences, glean insights from one another, and collaboratively generate fresh ideas to improve the interactions between law enforcement, crisis teams, and the I/DD community. Additionally, these sessions aided in identifying the training requirements for Service Coordinators regarding crisis resources to support caregivers more effectively.

Virtual Focus Groups Schedule:

- May 7, 2024, at 5 pm (English)
 - Participants = 12
- May 20, 2024, at 9 am (English)
 - Participants = 8

- May 20, 2024, at 11 am (Spanish)
 - Participants = 8
- May 22, 2024, at 1 pm (ASL)
 - Participants = 0
- May 23, 2024, at 5 pm (ASL)
 - Participants = 6
- May 28, 2024, at 5 pm (Spanish)
 - Participants = 0
- Total focus group participants= 34

Confirmation of Consent

Confirmation of consent to participate in a focus group served as a crucial step in ensuring ethical research practices and respecting participants' autonomy. This confirmation explicitly outlined the terms of participation, including the purpose of the focus group, the method of data collection, and the rights of the participants. By obtaining explicit consent, IRC upheld the principles of transparency and respect for individual rights, ensuring that participants were fully informed about the nature of the study and their involvement. Additionally, confirmation of consent provided a clear record of participants' willingness to engage in the research, which was essential for maintaining integrity and credibility in the research process.

Moreover, confirmation of consent fostered a sense of trust between IRC and participants, laying the foundation for a collaborative and respectful research

environment. Participants could feel assured that their contributions were valued and that their rights were protected throughout the study. Ultimately, the confirmation of the consent process not only safeguarded the rights of participants but also enhanced the validity and reliability of the research findings by ensuring that data collection was conducted with integrity and in accordance with ethical guidelines.

Mandated Reporter Statement

The researchers involved in this study are mandated reporters, meaning they are obligated by law to report any instances or suspicions of abuse, neglect, or harm to vulnerable populations identified during their research. This commitment underscores our dedication to the ethical conduct of research and the protection of individuals' welfare. This mandate was communicated at the outset of each focus group session and reiterated at the Member checking session.

Disclaimer

In the process of analyzing the data, it was necessary to redact certain portions due to the presence of profanity, threats, or other inappropriate content. This action was taken to maintain the integrity and professionalism of the analysis, ensuring that only relevant and respectful data is considered in our findings. It is imperative to emphasize that this report deliberately omits any mention, reference, or inclusion of names belonging to IRC staff, police officers, crisis response team members, other relevant personnel, and any agencies or departments serving the community.

Sample Size

Determining the appropriate sample size for a focus group involves considering various factors such as the research objectives, participant diversity, topic complexity, and practical constraints. Typically consisting of 6 to 12 participants per group, focus groups are qualitative research gatherings where participants engage in in-depth discussions about a specific topic. The diversity of participants is important, but so is ensuring some level of homogeneity within each group to facilitate meaningful conversations. The number of focus groups needed depends on the research goals, with larger studies or those aiming for generalizability potentially requiring multiple groups with different participants.

Practical considerations, including time, budget, and participant availability, also play a role in determining sample size. Additionally, researchers may consider data saturation, where no new insights emerge from additional data collection, as a criterion for stopping data collection. Ultimately, the sample size for focus groups is a balance between research objectives, participant diversity, and practical considerations.

Focus Group Outcomes

The thematic analysis of the focus group discussion reveals several key themes related to the interactions between police officers, SCs, crisis intervention teams, and individuals with I/DD. Below are the translated key themes identified from the Zoom focus group transcripts:

Key Themes:

1. Lack of Understanding and Training among Police Officers:

- Many participants highlighted that police officers often lack the necessary training to handle interactions with individuals with I/DD appropriately.
- For instance, a mother of four mentioned that police officers approached her child as if she was dangerous, indicating a lack of understanding of how to handle such situations empathetically.

2. Negative Encounters and Disrespect:

- Several participants recounted negative experiences with the police, including being spoken to condescendingly or being physically handled inappropriately.
- One participant shared that her son was spoken to in a disciplinary tone and touched on the shoulder, which caused him to shut down and revert to mutism.

3. Communication Barriers:

- There were significant communication barriers between police officers, SCs, crisis teams, and individuals with I/DD.
- Participants noted that officers often did not know how to communicate effectively with them.
- Suggestions included the need for officers to use non-verbal communication aids, such as picture cards or alternative augmentative communication (AAC) devices.

4. Need for Empathy and Patience:

- Participants emphasized the importance of empathy and patience in interactions with individuals with I/DD.
- A participant highlighted the need to avoid standing over individuals in a dominating manner and instead sit down to talk at their level, especially if the person is in a wheelchair.

5. Proactive Community Engagement:

- There is a call for proactive engagement between the police, SCs, crisis intervention teams, and the I/DD community.
- Suggestions included regular interactions and community outreach programs to build trust.
- One participant mentioned taking her child to the local police station to familiarize them with the officers and the environment.

6. Role of Caregivers and Families:

- Caregivers and families play a crucial role in bridging the gap between the I/DD community and police officers, Regional Center staff, and crisis intervention teams.
- Participants suggested that families should take steps to educate the community about their specific needs and situations, possibly through organized focus groups or training sessions.

7. Systemic Issues and the Need for Policy Changes:

- There were mentions of systemic issues within the police force and a need for policy changes to ensure better handling of cases involving individuals with I/DD.
- Participants shared experiences where investigations were not properly conducted due to biases and lack of proper documentation and training.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Focus Group

Key Themes

1. Experiences with Police:

- Participants shared varied experiences with police, ranging from helpful to problematic.
- One participant recounted how a lack of understanding by the police led to unnecessary physical intervention due to misinterpreting stimming behavior as aggression.

2. Communication Barriers:

- Communication remains a significant challenge, with participants emphasizing the inadequacy of current methods.
- Texting and picture communication were mentioned, but the lack of standardized tools like laminated communication boards was highlighted.

3. Training and Awareness:

- There is a consensus on better training for police officers.

- Participants suggested more comprehensive training programs that include understanding Autism and common behaviors associated with I/DD and individuals who are Deaf.

4. Crisis Intervention:

- The effectiveness of crisis intervention teams was discussed, with some participants having positive experiences and others noting a lack of awareness about these teams.
- This highlights the need for better communication and availability of these resources.

5. Community and Police Collaboration:

- Participants recommended regular interaction between the police, the I/DD, and the Deaf community through events and training sessions.
- This approach aims to build mutual understanding and better prepare police officers to handle situations involving individuals with I/DD and Deaf individuals.

Survey

The online survey provided a platform for participants to exchange their real-life experiences anonymously to improve interactions between law enforcement, crisis teams, and the I/DD community. IRC employed a premium edition of SurveyMonkey and Video Ask to streamline responses. The survey was accessible from March 31, 2024, to May 1, 2024, and **60** responses were received.

Confirmation of Consent

Establishing consent for an online survey involved several key steps to ensure participants were fully informed and willingly agreed to participate. Firstly, a clear and concise explanation of the survey's purpose was provided, outlining what data would be collected and how it would be used. This information was presented at the beginning of the survey in a consent statement form, and participants were given the option to indicate their consent by actively agreeing to participate through a checkbox.

Survey Quantitative Data

In the survey conducted by IRC, several key findings emerged regarding the experiences and perspectives of individuals with I/DD and their families. Consent to participate in the survey was overwhelmingly positive, with 98% agreeing to participate, while only 2% disagreed. Regarding the willingness to participate in virtual focus groups, 35% expressed interest, while 65% declined. Individuals interested in joining virtual focus groups were requested to submit their name and email address. Those who provided an email were invited to participate in one of six focus groups.

Primary language data revealed that 91% of respondents primarily spoke English, with 9% primarily speaking Spanish, and no mention of American Sign Language or low-frequency languages. The majority of respondents (97%) identified as parents of individuals with I/DD. Among these parents, the most common diagnoses for their loved ones were Autism (81%), Intellectual Disability (22%), and Cerebral Palsy (9%), with some individuals having multiple diagnoses.

The survey also explored whether loved ones received services from IRC, with 93% responding affirmatively. Respondents provided demographic information about their loved ones, indicating that 50% were aged from birth to 17, 27% were aged 24-34, and smaller percentages fell into other age brackets. Additionally, 51% identified their loved ones as White, 36% as Hispanic, and smaller percentages as Black/African American and Pacific Islander.

A small portion of respondents (5%) reported that they or their loved ones were Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Geographic distribution showed that 79% of respondents lived in Riverside County, while 21% lived in San Bernardino County. Concerning interactions with law enforcement, 82% of respondents had talked to police officers, and 49% had called the police to assist their loved ones in a crisis. However, only 28% felt that the police understood their loved one's disability. Feelings during interactions with the police varied, with 63% feeling scared and smaller percentages feeling angry, confused, upset, or other emotions.

Additionally, 36% of respondents had called the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) crisis team, with 63% of those receiving a response via phone, while 37% did not receive any response. Awareness of the Blue Envelope Program was relatively low, with only 21% of respondents indicating familiarity with it. Finally, respondents were invited to provide qualitative recommendations, with specific feedback available in the qualitative data section.

Survey Qualitative Data

Based on the qualitative data generated by the survey, several themes emerge regarding the interactions between law enforcement and individuals with disabilities, particularly focusing on the need for better training and understanding:

1. Lack of Understanding and Training:

- Multiple instances indicate a significant gap in police understanding of disabilities, including intellectual and neurological conditions such as ASD and Cerebral Palsy (CP).
- Examples include officers mistaking symptoms of disabilities for intoxication, using inappropriate language, and displaying aggression towards individuals with disabilities.

2. Fear and Trauma:

- Individuals express fear and trauma associated with interactions with law enforcement due to past negative experiences and perceived lack of understanding.
- The fear is heightened for Black/African American individuals with disabilities due to the increased risk of violence, as evidenced by the tragic deaths of Black/African American individuals with an I/DD.

3. Need for De-escalation and Sensitivity Training:

- There is a call for comprehensive training programs focusing on de-escalation techniques tailored specifically for individuals with disabilities.

- Sensitivity training is also highlighted as crucial for law enforcement officers, crisis response teams, and Regional Center SCs to communicate effectively and assist individuals/families in crises.

4. Lack of Support and Resources:

- Families and individuals with disabilities express frustration with the lack of support and resources provided by law enforcement and mental health services.
- SCs are criticized for their unresponsiveness and lack of knowledge in handling situations involving individuals with I/DD in a crisis, leaving families feeling unsupported and vulnerable.

5. Community Engagement and Education:

- Suggestions include implementing programs where individuals with I/DD can interact with law enforcement officers in non-crisis settings to alleviate fear and promote understanding.
- There is a call for community engagement initiatives to educate both law enforcement and the public about different disabilities and how to interact with individuals who have them appropriately.

6. Advocacy for Change:

- There is a strong advocacy for systemic change, including better policies, procedures, and accountability measures within law enforcement agencies to address the needs of individuals with disabilities.
- Families express a desire for proactive measures to protect their loved ones and ensure their safety during interactions with law enforcement.

These themes collectively underscore the urgent need for improved training, increased awareness, and better support systems to ensure the safety and well-being of individuals with I/DD during interactions with law enforcement.

Video Ask Survey

Inland Regional Center Police Interaction Survey employed the Video Ask online survey platform to collect input from the Deaf and Deaf Plus community and their families. Video Ask offers a unique survey experience by integrating video messages with interactive questions, fostering engagement and personalization. Moreover, it is an adaptable tool for engaging the Deaf community, providing accessible communication methods, and encouraging inclusive interaction. With its diverse features and customization options, organizations can effectively engage Deaf individuals in their programs and initiatives.

Video Ask Survey Results

A concerning lack of participation from the deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) community has resulted in an absence of usable data for analysis. Despite utilizing the Video Ask format, the content provided did not yield any accessible information or relevant details that were comprehensible to D/HH individuals. Moving forward, we emphasize the

importance of inclusive practices and prioritizing accessibility considerations in all communications to ensure equitable access for individuals of all backgrounds.

Blue Envelope

Recently, initiatives like the "Blue Envelope" program have gained attention as potential tools for enhancing community safety and interaction with law enforcement. Designed to facilitate communication between individuals with special needs and first responders, particularly in moments of distress or emergency, such programs aim to bridge gaps in understanding and improve outcomes for vulnerable populations.

The "Blue Envelope" Program functions by empowering individuals to effortlessly display the Blue Envelope logo or present a Blue Envelope when engaging with law enforcement or other community service personnel. Blue Envelope-branded items, such as the Blue Envelope Program Brochure, Wallet Information Card, Lanyards, Seatbelt Covers, Buttons, Ribbons, Key Chains, Bracelets, and Stickers, may contain duplicates of the individual's identification, contact information, or crucial vehicle operating documents like vehicle registration and proof of insurance.

One prominent concern revolves around the metrics used to evaluate the program's effectiveness. While the distribution of blue envelopes and associated materials may serve as visible markers of program implementation, there's a lack of clarity regarding how success is measured beyond these superficial indicators. Stakeholders want to understand whether the program improves safety during interactions with law enforcement for individuals with special needs.

Recommendations for “Blue Envelope”

To effectively evaluate the "Blue Envelope" program and ensure its success in enhancing community safety and interaction with law enforcement, Regional Centers and Local Police Departments can implement the following training recommendations:

1. Program Familiarization Training:

- Conduct comprehensive training sessions for law enforcement officers, community service personnel, and individuals with special needs to familiarize them with the purpose, objectives, and implementation of the "Blue Envelope" program.
- This training should emphasize empathy, communication strategies, and understanding the unique needs of individuals with special needs.

2. Communication Skills Enhancement:

- Offer specialized training in communication skills and de-escalation techniques tailored to interactions with individuals with special needs.
- This training should focus on promoting effective communication, active listening, and non-verbal cues to ensure positive and respectful interactions.

3. Collaborative Training with Stakeholders:

- Foster collaboration with stakeholders, including disability advocacy organizations, healthcare providers, and community leaders, to develop and deliver joint training initiatives.

- By leveraging diverse perspectives and expertise, these collaborative training efforts can enhance program effectiveness and promote community engagement.

4. Cultural Sensitivity Training:

- Integrate cultural sensitivity training into existing programs to raise awareness of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and communication preferences within the community.
- This training should emphasize respect for individual differences and the importance of cultural competence in building trust and rapport.

5. Continuous Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms:

- Establish robust evaluation mechanisms to assess the program's impact on safety during interactions with law enforcement for individuals with special needs.
- This may include collecting feedback from program participants, tracking incidents and outcomes, and conducting periodic reviews to identify areas for improvement.

6. Data Collection and Analysis:

- Implement systematic data collection processes to capture relevant metrics, such as the frequency and nature of interactions, the effectiveness of communication strategies, and any incidents or challenges encountered during program implementation.

- Analyze this data to identify trends, measure progress, and inform decision-making.

7. Community Outreach and Education:

- Launch proactive outreach and education campaigns to raise awareness of the "Blue Envelope" program within the community.
- This may involve distributing informational materials, hosting public forums, and engaging with local media to highlight success stories and promote community participation.

By prioritizing these training recommendations and adopting a proactive approach to program evaluation, Regional Centers and local Police and Sheriff's Departments can enhance the effectiveness of the "Blue Envelope" program and foster positive relationships between law enforcement and individuals with I/DD.

Member Checking Session

The Member Checking Session allowed the researchers to validate the findings and insights gathered from the focus groups conducted with individuals with I/DD and caregivers. It served as a crucial step in ensuring the accuracy and credibility of the data collected during the research process. Participants who attended the focus groups were invited to review and provide feedback on the preliminary findings presented during the Member Checking Session. This process allowed them to confirm the accuracy of their contributions and provide additional insights or perspectives that may have been overlooked. The Member Checking Session aimed to foster transparency and inclusivity by

involving participants in validating the research findings, ultimately enhancing the overall rigor and validity of the study.

- June 24, 2024, in person, 530 pm to 630 pm, 1425 South Waterman Ave. San Bernardino, CA. 92408.
- Participants= 15

Data Saturation

The Focus Group and online survey data reached saturation, indicating a comprehensive understanding of the target population's perspectives and experiences. This occurs when further data collection does not yield substantially new insights or perspectives, suggesting that the research has adequately captured the range and depth of opinions and attitudes within the studied group.

Trustworthiness of Survey Data

The trustworthiness of data depends on several factors beyond just sample size, although sample size is an important consideration. When the sample size is too small, it can lead to unreliable or biased results because the sample may not adequately represent the population. With a small sample size, there's a higher chance of sampling error, which is the difference between the sample statistic and the population parameter due to random chance. However, even with a small sample size, the data can still be trustworthy if the sample is carefully selected to be representative of the population and if appropriate statistical techniques are used to analyze the data. For example, if the sample is chosen

randomly and covers the relevant diversity within the population, the data can still provide valuable insights.

Recommendations

Based on the survey results and focus group themes outlined in this report, here are five strong recommendations for law enforcement, Regional Centers, and Crisis teams, as well as three strong recommendations for parents and clients of Regional Centers:

Recommendations for Law Enforcement, Regional Centers, and Crisis Teams:

1. Enhanced Disability Sensitivity and De-escalation Training:

- Law enforcement officers, Regional Center staff, and crisis intervention teams should undergo comprehensive training focused on understanding I/DD, with a particular emphasis on autism, cerebral palsy, and other neurological conditions.
- This training should include de-escalation techniques, effective communication strategies, and the use of non-verbal communication aids such as picture cards and alternative augmentative communication (AAC) devices.

2. Collaborative Community Engagement Programs:

- Establish regular community engagement programs where law enforcement officers and crisis teams interact with the I/DD community in non-crisis settings.

- These programs should aim to build trust, reduce fear, and familiarize officers with individuals with I/DD. Activities might include community outreach events, safety fairs, and visits to local police stations.

3. Cultural Sensitivity and Empathy Training:

- Integrate cultural sensitivity and empathy training into existing programs to raise awareness about diverse backgrounds, experiences, and communication preferences within the I/DD community.
- This training should focus on respecting individual differences and building trust and rapport through empathetic and patient interactions.

4. Proactive Policy Changes and Accountability Measures:

- Implement systemic policy changes to ensure better handling of cases involving individuals with I/DD.
- This includes setting clear expectations for SCs during crises, proactively contacting families in crisis, and ensuring proper resources are provided when requested.

5. Continuous Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms:

- Establish robust evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of training programs and community engagement initiatives.
- This includes collecting feedback from program participants, tracking incidents and outcomes, and conducting periodic reviews to identify areas

for improvement. Implementing data collection and analysis processes will help measure progress and inform decision-making.

Recommendations for Parents and Clients of Regional Centers:

1. Active Participation in Training Programs:

- Parents and individuals with I/DD should be encouraged to participate in police officer training programs, sharing their personal experiences and specific needs.
- This participation can provide valuable insights for law enforcement officers and help tailor training to be more effective and empathetic.

2. Engagement in Safety Fairs and Community Events:

- Attend safety fairs and community events organized by Regional Centers and local law enforcement.
- These events provide opportunities to network with other families, access resources on safety protocols and legal rights, and engage directly with officers in a non-crisis setting, promoting understanding and reducing fear.

3. Educational Outreach and Advocacy:

- Families should take proactive steps to educate their communities about the specific needs and situations of individuals with I/DD.

- This can be done through organized focus groups, training sessions, and advocacy efforts. By sharing their experiences and challenges, families can help foster a more inclusive and supportive environment.

These recommendations aim to improve the interactions between law enforcement, crisis teams, and the I/DD community, ensuring safety, understanding, and inclusivity for all involved.

Low Participation from the I/DD Community

Disclaimer: The following insights were collected outside formal surveys and focus groups, derived from informal conversations with parents, clients, and stakeholders. It is important to note that these observations represent the researcher's theory and are not supported by research.

Individuals with I/DD and their families often exhibit reluctance when it comes to participating in focus groups and surveys addressing law enforcement, crisis teams and SC interactions. This hesitance stems from multifaceted reasons, collectively impeding advancements toward progress and equitable change within this realm. Foremost among these reasons is the deep-seated apprehension pervasive among this community, and understandably so. Fear of potential repercussions looms large, casting a shadow over their willingness to openly discuss encounters with law enforcement, crisis teams, and SCs. Past experiences or societal narratives of discrimination, stigma, or even outright mistreatment amplify this fear, creating a barrier to candid engagement.

Moreover, individuals with I/DD and their families frequently grapple with a sense of vulnerability within systems often perceived as indifferent or even hostile to their needs. This sense of vulnerability exacerbates their apprehension, rendering them cautious about

sharing their experiences, lest it invites further marginalization or adverse consequences. Additionally, there is a prevalent sense of power imbalance at play, wherein individuals with I/DD may feel disempowered or disenfranchised in interactions with law enforcement, crisis teams, and SCs. This power dynamic further complicates their decision to participate in discussions involving exposing vulnerabilities or recounting potentially distressing encounters.

Furthermore, systemic factors contribute to this hesitance. Limited representation and advocacy within mainstream discourse often leave individuals with I/DD feeling unheard or overlooked. Consequently, they may question the efficacy of participating in focus groups or surveys, doubting whether their voices will truly be considered or if their input will lead to tangible change. This skepticism towards the utility of their involvement acts as a significant deterrent, hindering their willingness to engage in such initiatives.

Addressing these barriers requires a comprehensive approach that acknowledges and actively works to dismantle the systemic inequalities and power imbalances at play. Creating safe spaces for dialogue, fostering trust through transparent communication, and actively involving individuals with I/DD and their families in the design and implementation of research initiatives are crucial steps toward fostering meaningful engagement.

Low Participation by the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) community exhibits notably low participation in focus groups and surveys regarding police interactions. This underrepresentation can be attributed to several barriers:

1. Communication Challenges:

- Traditional focus groups and surveys often rely on verbal communication and written text, which may not be accessible to individuals who are D/HH. However, IRC provided American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters for focus groups and offered a Video Ask option using ASL to ask questions to improve accessibility and participation from the D/HH community.

2. Trust and Safety Concerns:

- Historical and ongoing negative experiences with law enforcement may result in distrust and fear within the D/HH community. Individuals may be hesitant to participate in discussions about police interactions due to concerns about potential repercussions or skepticism about the impact of their feedback.

3. Awareness and Outreach:

- The D/HH community may not be aware of these focus groups and surveys. Additionally, outreach efforts may not effectively reach D/HH individuals if they are not conducted through appropriate channels, such as D/HH organizations, social media platforms used by the community, and in-person community events. However, IRC addresses this by utilizing social media and leveraging their on-staff D/HH Specialist in an extensive marketing campaign.

4. Cultural and Linguistic Barriers:

- The D/HH community has a distinct culture and linguistic identity, primarily centered around sign language. Mainstream focus groups and surveys may not account for these cultural nuances, making participation less appealing or relevant to D/HH individuals. To address this barrier, IRC offered a survey in ASL using the Video Ask platform and two focus groups in ASL.

IRC FY 24/25 Performance Contract Locally Developed Public Policy Measure

To establish equitable crisis Intervention programs, it is essential to incorporate additional safeguards and foster partnerships within the community, ensuring fair and just treatment for all individuals during crises. A comprehensive and systematic approach is necessary to effectively measure and evaluate the program's impact.

Activities

Crisis Intervention Program Provider: The IRC will collaborate closely with Pacific Clinics to create a Crisis Intervention Program in Riverside County.

Data Collection:

- Quantitative Data: Collect data on the number and types of crises reported, response times, and intervention outcomes.
- Qualitative Data: Conduct interviews and surveys with program participants, community members, and stakeholders to gather insights into their experiences and perceptions of the program's effectiveness and fairness.

Comparative Analysis and Community Involvement:

- Engage community stakeholders in the evaluation process through focus groups and advisory committees.
- Collaborate with the Autism Society Inland Empire to conduct three focus groups and one online survey in July 2025 to gather insights on the lived experiences of clients and families during crises and police interactions.

Feedback Loops:

- Implement regular feedback loops where data and findings are shared with clients, parents, caregivers, and community partners.

Blue Envelope Program:

- Continue collaborating with the Riverside Sheriff's Department to roll out the Blue Envelope Program.
- Work closely with the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department to implement their Blue Envelope Pilot Program.

Safe Return Program/Special Needs Reunification Program:

- Collaborate with the Riverside Sheriff's Department to ensure their Special Needs Reunification Program is accessible in multiple languages and market the program to those served by IRC in Riverside.
- Continue working closely with the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department to promote the Safe Return Program.

Training:

- Work with the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department and the Department of Behavioral Health to provide I/DD awareness during the 40-hour CIT training and the Sheriff's Academy.
- Create a pilot program for ASL, Deaf/Plus, and I/DD awareness training for first responders in collaboration with community partners.

Quarterly Zoom Public Meetings Schedule (Feedback Loops):

- August 29th, 5:30 PM - 6:30 PM
- October 17th, 5:30 PM - 6:30 PM
- December 12th, 5:30 PM - 6:30 PM
- February 20th, 5:30 PM - 6:30 PM
- April 24th, 5:30 PM - 6:30 PM
- June 26th, 5:30 PM - 6:30 PM

Conclusion

The findings from IRC's research highlight the critical need for enhanced training and awareness within law enforcement and crisis intervention agencies when dealing with individuals with I/DD. The focus group discussions and survey responses underline several key themes, including the lack of understanding and training among police officers, negative encounters and disrespect, communication barriers, and the need for empathy and patience. Additionally, proactive community engagement and the pivotal role of

caregivers and families were emphasized, alongside systemic issues that require policy changes.

The recommendations provided aim to address these challenges through comprehensive disability sensitivity and de-escalation training, collaborative community engagement programs, and the implementation of systemic policy changes to ensure better handling of cases involving individuals with I/DD. Moreover, continuous evaluation and feedback mechanisms are crucial to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives and ensure their ongoing improvement.

By fostering a deeper understanding of I/DD and implementing appropriate strategies, law enforcement agencies can ensure that encounters are handled with sensitivity and respect, ultimately promoting the safety and well-being of everyone involved. The commitment to ongoing training, research, and collaboration will contribute to creating safer and more inclusive communities where individuals with I/DD are treated with dignity and understanding.

In conclusion, this report underscores the urgent need for systemic change to improve the interactions between law enforcement, crisis teams, Regional Centers, and the I/DD community. The voices of individuals with I/DD and their caregivers are invaluable in shaping policies, procedures, and practices that affect their daily lives. By prioritizing empathy, understanding, and proactive engagement, we can work towards genuine justice and equality for all, ensuring that every individual feels safe and supported within their community.

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