

Research Summarized! Leveraging Community Resources

Strengthening community networks and connections increases social capital, the advantage gained through relationships and social networks. Social capital can help individuals navigate complex school and workplace situations. Some deaf* individuals have limited access to social capital due to information deprivation and reduced access to full language environments. Without access to the full mix of informal and formal communication opportunities necessary to build social capital, it can be challenging for deaf individuals to gain entry into higher levels of responsibility and advancement.

What can be learned from the existing literature on leveraging community resources to improve postsecondary outcomes for deaf individuals?

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL THROUGH COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Community members can include both deaf and hearing people who reside in a region (either locally or nationally) and/or share similar cultural values (e.g., effective communication for all, accessibility, increasing opportunities for education and employment, social justice) and identification. Each of these intersecting communities brings different values and perspectives to community activities. Members may include but are not limited to parents, students, educators, employment service providers, representatives of disability organizations, and local legislators.

Both rural and urban communities emphasize using strategies such as connecting stakeholders, strengthening existing collaborations, and educating new employers on the importance of increasing employment opportunities for people with disabilities to build social capital.³

Community members and stakeholders can effectively work together to identify what actions need to be taken at the local community and state levels to improve employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.¹⁰

Community members can build social capital by sharing experiences and advice on how to navigate inaccessible settings and cope with frustrating obstacles in a hearing-dominated society.⁷

*In this report, we use the term *deaf* in an all-encompassing manner to include individuals who identify as Deaf, hard of hearing, hearing impaired, late deafened, and deafdisabled.

OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Identifying as part of the deaf community can be beneficial for self-esteem, which is highly related to achievement.^{4,13} Further, community membership can help cushion discrimination, rejection, and failure.⁸

Deaf community members are an invaluable resource in providing guidance to hearing parents with a deaf child.²⁶

Deaf role models help build social capital by providing support with language development, communication skills, social skills, and guidance within academic and work settings.⁵

Increased access and opportunities for engaging with deaf role models and peers bolsters the number of protective factors in a youth's life.²⁰

Mentors of the same cultural or ethnic background have special insight into the challenges of navigating academia as a minority. Such mentors are better positioned to provide effective psychosocial and career development support.^{11,15,18}

People who attend community discussion events report being more aware of what they can do to increase employment opportunities for young people with disabilities.²⁴

TYPES OF COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES THAT BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL

Key components of community-based approaches to building social capital include the following:

- Identifying common issues that require attention
- Identifying possible evidence-based solutions to common issues
- Devising specific strategies for collaborating with essential stakeholders and developing a plan for implementation¹⁹

One strategy for building social capital that allows community members to discuss important issues and strategies to address these issues is termed “community conversations.”³ The following are core assumptions of community conversations:

- All communities possess unique social and cultural resources.
- Community members are experts on the most important challenges that face the community and the most viable solutions for addressing challenges.
- Communities that come together identify new resources and ideas through connections with people with different perspectives and life experiences.
- Real and lasting change comes with strategies and approaches that originate in the community.

Ideas produced through community conversation provide critical information for stakeholders on what services and systems change efforts are needed.¹⁶

Extracurricular activities outside of school such as athletics, religious activities, youth groups, or performing art groups increase links to community networks.^{17, 21, 25}

TAKE-AWAYS

The literature supports strengthening community networks and connections to increase social capital, which can help individuals navigate complex school and workplace situations. Within deaf communities, community-based advocacy and research increases participant buy-in, increases collaboration, and gains the trust of deaf people.¹ Strong community networks and relationships are important for the success of deaf youth.⁶ Strengthening community connections, particularly with the deaf community, contributes significantly to psychosocial well-being^{2, 13, 14} and persistence toward degree completion.^{9, 22}

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