CULLY JOB TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT NEEDS

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Overview

More than half of Cully’s residents are African-American, Hispanic, Latino, Native American, Somali, Kenyan and Asian and a quarter of Cully residents live below the poverty line, compared with a regional average of 9.9 percent, the neighborhood. Almost nine in 10 students living in Cully qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The neighborhood’s median income is $10,000 less than the city average.

Given these statistics, better understanding Cully residents’ needs for employment, training, and education are vital to economic stability in the neighborhood. Portland State researchers conducted 94 brief interviews with low-income Cully residents to know more about the unmet employment needs of this population.

This report provides a summary of these interview findings including desired occupational groups, barriers to employment, and suggestions to increase access to opportunities.
Research Design and Research Questions

As little is known about the range of job needs in Cully, the research team designed an open-ended and qualitative approach to engaging low-income residents. Rather than a traditional paper survey, the team planned to use these interviews to elicit a range of responses to a short series of questions that would identify both occupational needs as well as barriers to getting a job or accessing training. This research was driven by the following questions: What types of jobs do low-income Cully residents wish to have? What types of training or education would they need to get the types of jobs they want? And what challenges exist that make it hard for them to access such trainings?

Research Methods

This study utilized short intercept interviews with low-income Cully residents currently employed, or interested in gaining employment. A total of 94 interviews, lasting 5-10 minutes in length were conducted in person, while 2 were conducted by phone for the convenience of participants. To be included in this research, participants had to: 1) live in the 97218 area code; 2) Be over 18 years old; 3) Report an annual household income of $40,000 or less OR report earning $14 an hour or less; and 4) Be currently employed and/or seeking employment.

Participants were recruited primarily face-to-face in the Cully neighborhood in public spaces and events, though the study was also publicized online. The majority of interviews were conducted in English, though ten interviews were conducted in Spanish. All participants were offered a $5 Albertsons gift card for their participation. At the start of each interview, participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire; no personal information was connected to any participants’ names. All interviews were transcribed and coded in a qualitative data analysis software program.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Demographics</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender (N=94)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Man</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Attainment (N=91)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Current Age in Years (N=94)</strong></td>
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<td>18-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>60 or older</td>
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Note: (N=94) All demographic info is shared, although not all participants provided all info.
Desired Fields of Employment

Although a range of fields and occupations were mentioned by participants, jobs in manufacturing, teaching, construction, food service, medical/nursing, and clerical or administrative fields were the most commonly mentioned. Retail, government, occupational fields that were mentioned, but by fewer than two individuals in the study include child care, cosmetology, agriculture financial management, counseling, and truck driving.
Barriers to Employment

Participants in this study identified a variety of challenges to their ability to access job training and secure the types of employment they most desired. We summarize these below in four main categories: Transportation and Housing; Social and Mental Health Issues; Job Skills and Training; and Financial and Economic Challenges.

Barrier: Transportation and Housing

A large number of participants reported that issues pertaining to transportation and stable/affordable housing prevented them from accessing their ideal employment opportunities. Specifically, many participants reported problems with the bus lines that run through the Cully Neighborhood. One participant noted that the 71 does not run early enough for him to use it to get to work on time— an issue that was supported by a second interviewee, a 54 year old white male, who stated in reference to the bus schedule, “You know, your job’s at three in the morning and the bus don’t go until five you know?” Frequent disruptions in bus routes due to construction, or “shit popping off downtown” as
one 40 year old white male put it, also served as an impediment to individuals accessing job opportunities. Additionally, several individuals expressed difficulty in accessibility of the transportation services. One participant noted that “Transportation is kind of a bummer in the neighborhood because there's only two bus-lines and you got to walk a little ways to get there.” In sum, a range of respondents expressed that the transit options were not frequent or flexible enough to support the types of employment opportunities that were most desired.

In relation to housing, participants expressed the difficulty in obtaining work while their housing situation remained unstable. One specific participant who identified as transient stated “[You]Can't work from the streets... And I mean a functional place...you can't go to work and then come home and find everything gone.” Beyond those participants who were without stable housing, a number of interviewees noted that even finding available and affordable housing to rent proved to be a challenge. One female participant with an advanced degree reported that she and her partner had to resort to living out of their car while they looked for available housing in the neighborhood. Ultimately, challenges in relation to transportation and housing diminished the overall livability of the neighborhood and created problematic obstacles in accessing job opportunities, holding a steady job, or acquiring additional skills or training outside the neighborhood.

**Barrier: Social And Mental Health Issues**

Low-income Cully residents consistently noted that a lack of social supports in the form of child care, mental health services, disability services, and domestic violence programs created consistent, routine challenges in getting and keeping a job.

**Childcare:** Discussed by many individuals in this study, particularly women, childcare was seen as a significant barrier when accessing job training or higher education. This was especially true for women who became parents when they were young and/or lacked family support for childcare. In general, non-familial childcare was seen as too expensive and potentially unsafe. Additionally, some women noted having trouble with unreliable
transportation in relation to finding or coordinating childcare. Multiple women noted that if their training or education program offered drop-in group childcare for free or a very low cost they would be more able to pursue certifications and education. While these women noted that some child care services are offered, few of these services encompass older elementary school children who are both too young to be left home alone for long periods of time and too old to be part of childcare geared towards infants and preschoolers. Cost of childcare is especially prohibitive for low-income women. Interviewees expressed feeling helpless and trapped in a childcare conundrum: they need to work in order to afford childcare, and they can't work because unsubsidized childcare is too expensive. As one mother noted, “I have three boys and it’s difficult for me to pay.”

The expense of child care, coupled with a reliance on infrequent or unreliable bus transportation, prohibited multiple women in this study from obtaining their Certified Nursing Assistant License. In an example relayed during an interview, a woman reported that she was trying to apply for her CNA license and was unable to, due to the lack of childcare. Another interviewee echoed this woman’s statement when he shared his sister’s struggle: “I have an older sister who was trying to apply for a CNA but didn't have childcare so she couldn't go... she did not end up going to the training because she didn't have childcare and then the trainings. One week they were one time and then the next week they were different times it wasn't the same time everyday.

**Social Supports:** Many respondents reported the need for specific social supports, such as mental health services, domestic violence shelters and disability services. As stated by one woman in the study, “I just need to have someone to talk to outside of what is going on, you know. Someone who won't judge you about what is going on, that's all.” Participants struggling with social and mental health issues noted that the problems often prohibited them from dedicating enough time and effort towards searching for or maintaining employment.
Other barriers to employment stem from participants’ pasts, such as previous injuries that were never properly attended to and criminal records that were never expunged. As one young man in the study pointed out, “My criminal record... It’s always a barrier.” Older participants also expressed how their age makes it difficult to secure jobs. One man in the study declared, “Nobody wants to hire me because I’ll be retiring in a couple years.” Improved access to comprehensive health and legal services, which could also benefit those potentially experiencing age-based discrimination in their job searches, could be critical to helping many participants overcome barriers to employment.

**Barrier: Job Skills and Training**

Among the various barriers to employment and advancement that were expressed, many respondents shared that a lack of skills or training was an obstacle for them. Several individuals mentioned that additional training would be beneficial when applying for jobs or they felt that their current skills were lacking and potentially preventing them from accessing certain jobs. The desired skills and training ranged from English language skills and GED classes to specialized certifications and computer skills. Some also indicated needing better professional communication skills.

In addition to lacking skills and desiring more training, there were commonly other barriers associated with attaining these skills, such as childcare, affordability of trainings and transit, and time. One respondent pointed out that while PCC offers classes like computer basics that would improve her chances of getting a job, there is no way she could afford them with her current wage. Another interviewee reported that the certification they needed to advance their career was both costly and time consuming, “...you have to do a four week long training that cost $3,000.... Most of the classes you can teach with 200 hours, but in order to teach some of the advanced classes, you have to go do 500 hours.”

There was also a sense that, despite feeling under-trained or that they were lacking skills, some individuals weren’t really sure what specific training they actually needed. Another theme among respondents was that training was not readily available in the neighborhood,
and that this made it difficult for some individuals to acquire the extra skills or training they required. Despite the PCC career center being located in the Cully neighborhood, none of the respondents mentioned being aware of this resource. Alternately, among respondents who were already pursuing some sort of skills or training, there were those who felt that they weren’t sure how to use or apply the skills they were learning. One respondent noted that,

“I guess just getting more, let’s see, networking, learning how to network, resume building, things like that. [...] Yeah, like I am going to school and everything, but I don’t know how to break into the industry.”

In sum, additional efforts to connect individuals with key resources is a vital step in helping created career mobility and economic stability for many residents, while basic training and skill-building support would benefit many individuals in this study.

**Barrier: Financial and Economic Challenges**

Many participants cited issues surrounding the affordability of higher education or certification programs as reason for struggling to find work in their desired field. Beyond reporting the need for financial assistance with schooling, a number of respondents stated that they also needed help with applying for the funding. Whether this was for applying for financial aid or scholarships, many participants noted that they did not know how to start the application process or where to look for scholarships that suit their needs. For instance, one participant said, “I know there are a lot of scholarships for Black people, a lot. I just, I just don’t know what to do.”

Additionally, several respondents also indicated that they were interested in starting their own business. For instance, when participants were asked if they would go into business for themselves, they were forthcoming with ideas. As one individual noted: “I wanna have my own business in cooking, to be honest with you.” Some are already engaged in small business ventures, such a food cart owners, while others cited a lack of capital as a
deterrent to starting a new business. For those individuals interested in opening their own business, many noted that they were most interested in opening food service, landscaping, and automotive repair businesses, however a lack of capital was consistently cited as a barrier to obtaining this goal. One participant spoke with us about his dream of turning his small food cart into a full scale restaurant, which would allow him to become his own employer. According to one African American man, “I would if I were given the opportunity, you know, it is a little of an overhead for the tools and stuff and the license.” Thus, the desire to work, be creative, and build successful businesses was expressed by many participants in this study, yet significant economic barriers made the realization of starting one’s own business something out of reach of those interviewed for this study.

Suggested Interventions to Promote Economic Stability for Low-Income Cully Residents

This report serves as a baseline for understanding the types of jobs and careers that low-income Cully residents want, along with the specific challenges that prevent them from achieving their goals. This report is not meant to be an exhausting accounting of every individual participant, but serves a summary of common themes or trends in the data. In closing, we suggest some potential solutions that might serve to increase the economic base in the Cully neighborhood. The suggestions provided below are a result of a combination of both the participants own ideas on how to better their economic situations and solutions drawn by the researchers after analyzing interview data.

**Neighborhood Job training:** Overall, given the extensive and widespread response that barriers regarding transportation presented significant obstacles to job training and education, respondents suggested that bringing job training opportunities into the Cully neighborhood would increase their ability to access such programs. Additionally, respondents were primarily interested in job training that would allow them to gain the skills and experience necessary to access jobs that do not require a higher level of education, such as service and retail work, or manufacturing and construction fields. Thus,
job training would may need to focus on resume building skills, communication skills, and/or manual labor skills and certifications.

**Transportation:** Providing support in the form of reduced transit fares, opportunities to carpool, and other mechanisms to allow for easier mobility might serve to increase access to opportunities.

**Childcare:** Providing childcare for children in a variety of developmental stages, infant through early elementary school, close to job training or educational services would help address the barrier of child care for residents in Cully. Reassuring people that the childcare options are safe and staffed by well trained employees is also critical.

**Better Information:** Potential for additional engagement with job training programs also lies in the prospect of providing clearer connections and access to information on such trainings; many respondents noted that they wish to obtain more skills and more training, but didn't really have clear ideas about how and where to access such programs. More communication and a centralized point of access regarding education, training, and resume or skill-building classes would benefit low-income residents greatly. For those hoping to acquire additional education at the college-level, assistance in finding financial aid and navigating the application process are also key interventions that might have a high impact in Cully.

**Comprehensive Health and Legal Services:** Given the range of physical, social, and economic challenges that low-income Cully residents face, a range of mental health services, support for those with disabilities, programming for formerly incarcerated individuals, and expanded domestic violence programming would all serve to increase the overall health and well-being of residents in ways that would enhance their job seeking and job retention capabilities.

**Loans for Small Business Owners:** Given the desire of many individuals to build and run their own businesses, small grants or low-interest loans given to help support business
start-ups might be very productive. Additionally, trainings related to starting and running a business would be well-received by many Cully residents.