**Workforce 3One**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Enough Is Known For Action Webinar Series**

**WIOA's Collaborative Partnership Models for Serving Youth with Disabilities**

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CHRIS WATSON: All right. To get kicked off, I'm going to kick it off to Carmen Rodriguez from the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. Carmen?

CARMEN RODRIGUEZ: Thank you. Good afternoon, all. Thank you all for participating in today's Enough is Known for Action webinar series. And thank you to all the presenters that we have lined up this afternoon.

The Enough is Known for Action webinar series focuses on youth programs regarding technical assistance strategy to support the youth workforce community, to prepare for the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, in absence of guidance and final regulations.

WIOA was signed into law by President Obama on July 22, 2014. WIOA also supersedes the Workforce Investment Act.

WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training opportunities, and supportive services to succeed in today's labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. WIOA also increases individuals with disabilities to access high-quality workforce services and prepares them for competitive integrated employment.

This webinar is a partnership between the employment and training administration, division of youth services, and the Boston regional office, the Office of Disability Employment Policy, the Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration, and the Institute for Educational Leadership.

Again my name is Carmen Rodriguez, and I'm with the U.S. Department of Labor Boston regional office, and I will be one of your hosts on today's webinar, along with my colleagues Cassandra Shoffler of the U.S. Department of Education's rehabilitation services administration.

Mindy Larson is also another one of our hosts. She's with the Institute for Educational Leadership, the national collaborative of workforce and disabilities for youth. We have a dynamic and passionate lineup of speakers this afternoon eager to share their experiences and models in place for serving youth with disabilities.

With that we have our first polling question. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your partnerships that serve youth with disabilities? And we have several options on here. Please take a minute to go through those. Thank you. And it looks as though it's a seven, we've been doing better over the last few years and we're seeing some good results for our youth with disabilities. We're seeing around 15.7 percent have chosen number five, unclear that's why we're here today.

So it looks as though there's been some collaboration, but obviously some improvements are needed. And I hope today's theme will inspire everyone increased interest for collaboration to provide better and improved services to youth with disabilities. Thank you.

So why this topic? The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act outlines a broader youth vision that supports an integrated service delivery system and provides a framework through which states and local areas can leverage other federal, state, local and philanthropic resources to support in school youth and out of school youth.

WIOA places greater emphasis and significantly changes youth programs where a minimum of 75 percent of funds must be spent on out of school youth activities. Another major change is the requirement where 20 percent of youth funds must be spent on work experience activities.

Another change is that youth with disabilities is now one of the barriers listed for program eligibility for in-school youth and out-of-school youth. And as you all know, under the Workforce Investment Act, youth with disabilities was not on the barrier list. Another major change is the career pathways development, where we're asking local areas to leverage resources to align education, employment, training and supportive services. Cassandra?

CASSANDRA SHOFFLER: Yes. Thank you. WIOA places significant evidence on serving students and youth with disabilities by increasing opportunities to practice and improve workplace skills, including internships and apprenticeships. With regard to pre-employment transition services available to students with disabilities, pre-employment transition services includes job exploration counseling, work based learning experiences including internships, work readiness, instrument, self-advocacy including peer mentoring.

It does require their agencies to reserve 15 percent of federal VR funds to provide pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities transitioning from secondary school to post-secondary, education programs and employment in competitive integrated settings, and to coordinate with services under IDE. But it also strengthens coordination between their agencies and LEAs in the revision of transition services provided under IDEA and the provision of pre-employment transition services.

The program is administered by the Department of Education, and our partners at DOL and HHS have always strived to create and expand access to training and employment opportunities for millions of youth and adults that seek services through our system. WIOA presents a tremendous opportunity to change the way our system operates.

Through WIOA we look forward to streamlining the way we do business in order to shape the nation's employment and training system into one that continues to provide improved outcomes for all job seekers, workers and employers. Thank you.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Cassandra Shoffler is the management and program analyst who serves as the rehabilitation services administration strategic partnership lead for cross-agency initiatives and cross-component work, strategy planning around specific topics and public outreach related to the public vocational rehabilitation programs. Cassandra also serves as the co-chair for the interagency committee on disability research, interagency committee on employment. So thank you, Cassandra.

MS. SHOFFLER: Thank you.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Just wanted to let everyone know also that employment and training administration has issued Training and Employment Guidance Letter 2314, WIOA youth program transition guidance, which explains in more detail the requirements mentioned in this slide, and provides examples for states and local areas to consider while implementing the WIOA youth programs.

So again this afternoon, today's agenda, we just went over the welcome and background. We're going to have Mindy Larson, our other host, will provide some insights on the national collaborative on workforce and disability for youth. We'll also briefly share some insights on the recently issued services to youth with disabilities provided under Title I of WIA, results from a survey conducted of the local workforce investment board. And we'll have of course our dynamic presenters this afternoon, we'll have some time for a question and answer session, and we'll also briefly go over some of the resources we have available as well.

So next we have Mindy Larson. Mindy is a senior program associate at the institute of educational leadership center for workforce development, where she serves as project manager and technical assistance liaison for the national collaborative on workforce and disability for youth.

Ms. Larson's prior experience includes managing youth workforce programs in the local juvenile justice system, conducting research and program evaluation in the out of school time field, imagining various national projects focused on professional development, quality standards, program improvement, and policy analysis, and youth workforce development. Mindy?

MINDY LARSON: Great. Thank you so much, Carmen and Cassandra. Really pleased to be co-hosting with you today, this webinar. And I'm really happy to see how many people we have joining us, and interested in learning more and sharing about serving youth with disabilities in the workforce system.

So I'll just tell you briefly about who I am in the national collaborative. IEL is a national nonprofit. And our center for workforce development specializes in strengthening policies and practices and building the capacity of the various organizations that support youth career readiness and transition to adulthood.

And for about 15 years now we've been leading the national collaborative on workforce and disability for youth, which is a national technical assistance center that's funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor. This technical assistance center was created to ensure that all youth have access to high quality services in integrated settings, to make sure that they can obtain education credentials, obtain and succeed in employment, and to be able to live independently in adulthood.

We spent a lot of time at the beginning of the development of this collaborative looking at what do we mean by high quality services in integrated settings, and how do we achieve this. So what we did was we developed a research informed framework called the guideposts for success. I hope some of you may already be familiar with it. But if not, I'm going to share a little bit of information. And hopefully we'll take a closer look at how you can use this.

So the guideposts for success answer these questions by outlining what all youth need to succeed. Youth with disabilities are first and foremost youth. They need the same high quality services, opportunities and support as every other young person. So the guideposts for success outline what all young people need in terms of five key areas. Preparation during the secondary school years and in school settings, we call this school-based preparatory experiences. They also need career preparation and work-based learning opportunities.

They need youth development and leadership opportunities. They need a range of assistance connecting to support services that are specific to their goals and various needs, we call this connecting activities. And then we don't want to forget about family. So we have another area called family involvement and support, because the family continues to be very influential even in a young adult's life, and also a critical source of support.

So the guidepost is organized around these five areas. And there's a breakdown of specific practices and needs in each of these five areas. And then there's also some additional things in each area that youth with disabilities need that are specific to individualized services, support, and opportunities relevant to having a disability. This includes things such as understanding and being able to obtain reasonable accommodations, learning about disability disclosure in employment situations and post-secondary education settings, counseling related to understanding how working may affect their disability benefits, and also developing self-advocacy skills related to their disability.

A central message in the guidepost is that collaborative partnerships are essentially to ensuring that all youth are receiving high quality services. No one can provide everything that youth need. So we must work together. We must collaborate. It's important to recognize that we can't and don't need to be experts in all areas.

But what we do need to do is provide what we have to offer to every young person, including young people with disabilities. We need to make sure that our doors are open and our places of work are welcoming, so that every young person feels like they can come in and obtain whatever services we can provide, and that they will get high quality service.

We also need to team up with others who have other expertise, services and resources. And we can do this by starting to learn what others have to add to what we already offer. This can be done through resource mapping and other ways of networking with other stakeholders and organizations in your community or in your state.

And then we need to create collaborative partnerships that are going to ensure that all youth can participant and succeed. So we've got some great examples of collaborative partnerships today on this webinar that are serving youth with disabilities. And we're excited to hear more about how they do this work through partnerships.

Before we hear from them, we want to make sure that you're aware of the resources that our technical assistance center, the NCWD youth, can offer to you. We have a website which is mentioned here on this slide, ncwd-youth.info, where you can find the guideposts for success framework that I just mentioned, a whole range of guides, briefs, fact sheets, and more publications that talk about policy and practice for serving youth with disabilities, as well as other disconnected youth including youth involved in the juvenile justice system, youth in foster care, youth with mental health needs, and those with learning disabilities.

We offer a lot of different types of professional development and information on career development, individualized plans in youth development. So please take advantage of these resources which are free to you. And contact us at any time with any questions you might have. Because we are here to help build your capacity and strengthen the work that you're doing.

We already had a polling question up at the beginning, but we're just going to come back to that polling question and get a sense of whether or not you're already aware of resources and services that are related to each of the five guidepost areas that I quickly gave you a little preview of. So if you are indicated, yes, you are familiar, then just click the box next to one or any of the five guidepost areas. And if your answer is no, just don't click any of the boxes. This will give us a sense of your familiarity already. Just going to take a few minutes to see the results of this poll.

Great. So lots of people are familiar with career preparation and work-based learning, which is great because that's such a central part of WIOA. Many are also familiar with school-based preparatory experiences, youth development and leadership, and family involvement, that's great to see. Connecting activities really has to do with the support services and how you help people connect to a range of services that they might need that aren't always provided by your own organization, but might be provided by others in your community or your state.

So OK. Well, thank you for giving us a sense of your knowledge around the guideposts for success already. At this point Carmen's going to share some more information that emphasizes why it's so important to think about how we can improve our services to youth with disabilities. Go ahead, Carmen.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Mindy. So on this slide you will note a chart that shows the unemployment rate for the US population in 2014, which was 5.9 percent. And you will note the significant challenges that we have with the number of individuals with disabilities that are unemployed. You will not that the youth with disabilities ages 16 through 19, 41 percent of them are unemployed. Again youth with disabilities ages 20 to 24, 25.7 percent of these individuals were unemployed. There's a need for us to continue the conversation across the country, across the board, through your local workforce investment boards, through conversations with employers, to talk about increasing and improving services to youth with disabilities. This is very critical and we have the models that we will be presenting today. I hope that they actually get you to talk about what better services we can provide.

So moving on. Here we have the next slide, just a brief about the survey that was conducted of the local workforce investment board. So some background, the study is a follow up to guidance in Training and Employment Letter 31-10. That's – (inaudible) – Employment and Training Administration guidance titled, increasing enrollment and improving services to youth with disabilities.

This study's goal was to define and understand how the local workforce investment board provided and targeted services to youth with disabilities, identified strategies that enhanced local capacity to provide services to youth with disabilities, and identified barriers for the provision of targeted services.

The study also finds that local workforce investment boards have created a strong foundation to support the provision of services to youth with disabilities. The study also indicates that the majority of local workforce investment boards report that there is a need for additional staff capacity building. The study also shows the extent to which the local workforce investment boards have sought to expand services and funding. Also shares that there's outreach specifically to recruit out of school youth with disabilities, and strategies for providing employment related services.

Finally the report provides recommendations confirmed by the majority of the local workforce investment board, where they have made tremendous investments that provide a strong foundation for serving youth with disabilities, such as dedicated staff and board, and even inclusion of the youth council members, staff and provider training, and community partnerships, as well as employer training investments. We provided a link to the report. It's included at the end of the PowerPoint slides in the resources section.

So with that we have our second polling question.

MS. SHOFFLER: Great. And it is, which types of agencies and organizations do you currently collaborate with? And again just please simply check the box to indicate current collaborations. We'll just go ahead and take a minute while you address the question. And what we're seeing is some significant collaboration with employers and vocational rehabilitation services, as well as post-secondary education institutions, and the new law to support innovative strategies to keep the pace with changing economic conditions and does call for improved collaboration with partners. Thank you for sharing, participating in the polling.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: So thank you. Mindy?

MS. LARSON: So sorry. I put myself on mute. So we have seven great speakers today, including Oz Mondejar from Massachusetts, Fabricio Balcazar from Chicago, Jill Burgess and Dennis Gober from Oklahoma, and Kim Runion, Katie Dichard and Eric Woodard from New Hampshire. Our first presenter, Oz Mondejar.

OZ MONDEJAR: Well, good afternoon, everyone. And thank you very much, Mindy and team, for inviting me to participate in this important call, and especially Department of Labor for really driving so many initiatives.

Carmen articulated the work of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and I have been invited to sit on that council of 25 or so, really representing the business side of the community. So I don't come from a service provider perspective. I come from the business segment, which I was thrilled to see that many of the folks polled have relationships with the business community. It's critically important to us in recruiting and retaining from the right pool of talented folks that may happen to have disabilities.

I'm going to address briefly the four subcommittees and just maybe one more second on the one that I'm participating in, which is the marketplace dynamics subcommittee. So just for a point of reference, we've been already meeting as a council for about six months. Our interim report is now being polished to submit for public review. And this is a two-year initiative that was just really launched in terms of putting our arms around the integration and competitive wages for those with significant disabilities. Youth transition is a very critical important part of this. So I'm thrilled that you're focusing on youth.

So just for the transition to careers – the capacity building, let me start there. The focus of this subcommittee is to build a systematic and professional capacity for increasing competitive employment for individuals with intellectual and development disabilities, and other significant challenges. So that's one subcommittee that's working very diligently. The other is the transition to careers, which really is – I was torn between which one I wanted to sit on because this is critically important to the future workforce.

And this is all about what we're all discussing today, the transition of youth with significant disabilities to competitive and integrated employment. And the committee is examining what's out in the field right now to improve some of those services or to think about other ways that we can engage youth in career – systematically engage youth and careers and connect them to the right services.

The complexity and needs subcommittee, that's a very broad committee which is looking at the larger scope and the impact of transitions of this act, and what it's going to mean to case management, to individualized programs, eligibility factors, and how it's structured in a way that is also supportive of family, and how it also impacts incentives.

Now from the marketplace dynamics subcommittee, which is the one I know most about, and once again there are two employers on this council and we're representing one in Massachusetts. And this particular committee is looking at how do we then educate business, how do we take and transfer the resources that are available for youth transitioning, and how do we incorporate them into the actual for-profit or not-for-profit public sector.

It's hearing directly from contractors, it's hearing directly from business owners, and representatives from this community is coming to give us their feedback. I think it's critically important that we include business. And I say that for two reasons. One is we can't do it by ourselves from the service providers' perspective. I tend to straddle both.

But from the business side, unless we educate business of what it takes and demystify the disability employment process, I think we'd fall short. So I'm very excited that this subcommittee of the marketplace dynamics is taking this not only seriously, but really reaching out to many businesses that are already on this path, but also encourage more of a business to business discussion.

So with that I'm going to turn it over to my next slide. Just for a brief introduction to the work that I do in Massachusetts, but a little bit more on the national level, we're part of a system of hospitals called Partners Healthcare System. And my area of responsibilities includes human resources, marketing communication, community outreach.

Within that context we drive the rehabilitation side and are deeply involved in workforce development. Partners Healthcare is the largest private employer in Massachusetts, about 60,000 employees. And I always think of the hospital system, not only thinking about clinical care, but thinking of a hotel within a hospital. So we have many, many opportunities to include youth in work experience, and partner with many, many organizations that I'll share more about in a minute.

If you look at the next slide, we do this for not only the right reasons, and we've had many discussions around the handout versus the hand up. And from my particular lens, I think of it as a business imperative that we target a community with disabilities in terms of our talent pool. Now it's not always clear cut. And we do it for building our pipeline when you think of youth, but also those that are graduating and those who already have had some career experience. And there's an agenda, there's a business agenda in this, which I hope that you take to heart.

One is that we want to reflect the community that we work in, that we provide our services in. So quality outcomes and customer service is critical to everything we do. And critical certainly in healthcare, obviously it's a very personal service. But it's critical in hospitality, it's critical in manufacturing, it's critical in retail, and it's critical in finance. So this is very transferable to the marketplace.

It gives us an opportunity to be involved in the communities, to make sure that we attract the best and the brightest from all communities. Plus we want to be the best at everything we do. And it attracts political support. It's very, very important to productivity. If we're reflecting the communities we serve, we're better at being prepared to provide that service. And certainly from a grant perspective and accreditation, we can speak about what we're doing in the community, and we certainly have allies.

So it's a very transferable piece, especially when you're thinking of OFCCP in terms of their work in making sure that the employment opportunities are increased. It's qualified us for grants and it's a great story. So we're very committed to that.

Not to go into any great detail, but some of the work that we're doing in going what we call beyond compliance, whether it's the Americans with Disabilities Act, which is obviously a threshold legislative piece. We look at everything we do to empower the folks that we serve, and beyond that really attract the right talent to work within our facilities.

We have adaptive sports, and if you think of adaptive sports for youth and recreation, if you're able to play, if you're able to be included in any particular initiative that's out there, it might prepare you better for the world of work. And it wasn't until recently that we did not get included. Assistive technology as you well know is critical in terms of competitive employment. We have embedded vocational rehab specialists in our system, which actually is the conduit to all this talent pool. And we have a few other bullets there that you see.

I wanted to spend a little bit of the time that I've been allotted to talk about youth transition programs that we have engaged with over the years. You're familiar with Project SEARCH. And if you haven't, it was an organization that started in Cincinnati at the children's hospital there. They're very successful in what they provide for on the job training. We're a host company. We have several different sites within the work that I'm involved in.

And it's been not only productive for the students that are learning about the elements of work, being on time, being presentable, understanding your responsibilities, etc. Every single youth would benefit from this experience. So we've been successful in launching this in a couple of different areas. They're about placement, but more about on the job training.

I want to spend a little bit more time also on partners for youth with disabilities, which is based out of Massachusetts, but it's really been a model for the nation. And interesting enough they were a part of the breakout youth leadership forum many years back. Partners for youth with disabilities started off as a mentor match program, matching individuals with disabilities with youth with disabilities, so they can be a role model or a peer leader.

Well, in many ways the students are the clients or the youth are actually really giving an awful lot back to the mentors. That's one important and critical piece because sometimes the youth with disabilities are isolated. In this particular case they're brought in as a community, whether it's physically or online. They have a mentor match relationship also that's been launched nationally and internationally, to mentor youth with disabilities. So it's perfect for those that are in rural areas.

They also have a family component to support families and understanding their kids or their youngsters, can move on and have a productive live. So they're feeling the balance and maybe letting to a little bit of the youth for them to get their own wings.

They have a significant program called the young entrepreneurs program, which not every single youth is going to have a business, but it teaches you business survival skills, how to present yourself, how to sell your wares, how do you tell your story, what's your elevator speech. And so the disability becomes the second part of the discussion, not the first part of the discussion. In other words, we all need to present ourselves in the best light when we go to the interview. And they do a terrific job with that.

Beyond that and in concert with that, they have what they call healthy living and healthy connections, which includes independent living, which includes intimacy, which includes really taking care of your own needs as much as you can, and what support systems are there. So living independently or living within the community.

They are also about recreation and sports, and to someone's point earlier that youth also need to be included in the discussion. And they're all about youth. And they start very young, but also transition to young adulthood. So I'm a big fan of theirs and have seen the success in terms of their helping to place folks in good jobs. And they're growing in this area.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you very much, Oz, for your presentation. We've gone over the allotted time and there's a couple more slides that Oz would have liked to go over. Everyone has access to the PowerPoint slides. If there are any questions whatsoever, please use the chat feature and we'll be answering some of those questions during our Q and A session.

MS. MONDEJAR: Terrific.

MS. LARSON: Great. And this is Mindy again. I just want to say thank you to Oz. And we are also pleased to have three speakers who represent the Add Us In grant project, which is funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy at U.S. DOL.

And the first is Fabricio Balcazar, who's the director of the Center for Capacity Building on Minorities with Disabilities at the University of Illinois at Chicago. So Fabricio, welcome.

FABRICIO BALCAZAR: Thank you. And buenas tardes, everybody. I'm very pleased to be able to share with you some of our findings from two projects that have been the result of the assistance from ODEP and also our close collaboration with the Illinois Division of Rehabilitation Services.

So I'm going to be describing very briefly our certification and internship and employment project with the Youth Connection Charter School for dropouts here in Chicago, and our new business incubator initiative supported by the division of rehabilitation services, and some of the best practices and systems changes that have resulted from that partnership.

Very briefly, Youth Connection Charter School is a large school for dropouts in the city. I have been a board member for over 17 years and it's very close to my heart. I volunteer there. The school has openings for up to 4,000 students, almost $40 million. It is located across 22 small campuses across the Chicago area. The majority of the students are low income African American and Latinos. And there are at least 700, sometimes 800 students with IEPs, and almost 50 special education teachers at any given point. The students have received funding from us through the Add Us In initiative and also through general support from the Illinois division or rehabilitation services.

In terms of the best practices that we have found through this partnership, is the point of entry through VR. As you can imagine these kids are all over the town and there are offices all over town. And if they have to go into the system through every office, that will be a nightmare. So we were able to get a single point of access to all of the information in the system that made the whole transition very smooth for opening all the VR cases as quickly as possible. Our Add Us In grant supports a case management that has overseen the operation and working very close with the case manager from DRS.

In terms of employment for the kids, we identify employers' needs, we provide whatever training and certification that the employers require through the funding, and provide a paid internship of eight weeks to the kids. And the agency, the charter school is responsible for paying directly the students. So employers only have to provide the timesheets and reports about the performance of the kids.

The costs are all covered by DRS in terms of the training, the certification and the internships. And the partners, a lot of very large corporations, have agreed to engage in this through a memorandum of understanding with the expectation that the majority of the youth will actually be hired, although they are encouraged to treat the students as any other employee. And if they have to fire somebody, they will fire. And of course the students learn to be accountable, be responsible, and experience the consequences of their own behavior.

In terms of the case management, the case management is very effective because they are in contact with the students, the family and the VR counselor. The family sometimes experiences concern about the possibility of losing their welfare benefits. And sometimes they can hold their children back, preventing them from participating in this kind of program.

To that effect we encourage families to contact benefit counselors, and we provide the information explaining to them the benefits of the employment experience and the shortcomings of life dependency on welfare. The VR counselors are also encouraged not to close the case before they contact our case manager at YCCS, so that person will be in touch with the students or the family before the case is closed to make sure that the case is not closed prematurely.

In terms of the second program, our business incubator program, with the general support of the state VR agency that invested over $1.5 million in staffing, equipment, and preparing a building to start this business incubator, that started here at the university a few years back, and then we transferred the whole operation to the state so it will be continued. And the program started as a pilot and we just got news from the director of the institution, the Illinois Center for Rehabilitation Services here down the street from us, that the pilot has been now converted into a permanent program by the state agency, which is excellent news.

What are some of the best practices that we have learned from this experience? The importance of conducting early vocational comprehensive evaluations of the kids, that allows them to take charge of their decision making, understand their abilities, their strengths, and the potential challenges and barriers, especially with regards to either pursuing employment, or self-employment, or pursuing just regular employment.

The whole question about employment versus entrepreneurship is often discussed with the participants. And we help them analyze the external and internal factors that might influence the success or potential failure of their choices and the decision making. So it is becoming very important for us to help the students develop the vocational skills that will prepare them either for employment or entrepreneurship.

In terms of recruitment, the agency at VR has been working very closely with the whole set of offices in the city to allow for more referrals. And also we have been in discussions with the state VR top administrators to try to streamline the paperwork process and the policies regarding the funding and support for the entrepreneurship application.

One of the things that we discussed in analyzing the conditions was that it was too much work for the VR counselors to actually facilitate this process on their own. And by having the incubator, the whole process of creating the business plan, develop a great deal of the work that was in the hands of the counselor, is now being conducted by the incubator, which actually facilitates their involvement much more.

In terms of the business plan, the essence is one-on-one technical assistance and consultation through our business experts that we are bringing from the school of business and other professionals here from the university, and then the business plan writing process and the support and technical assistance that is being offered at the mentoring through the business incubator.

In terms of critical elements, of course you will know that the VR has resources to support entrepreneurship, plus we are also using additional resources from Add Us In to support the startups. And in the future we are looking at exploring this year cooperative businesses and small partnerships, limited partnership with groups of consumers that could facilitate more participation among individuals with different degrees of ability.

In terms of lessons learned, obviously our collaboration as a state school, and the charter, and the state, or the institution, is very critical because it allows for the evaluation of the process and the introduction of best practices. We believe that employers are unlikely to hire people with disabilities just by listening or talking about it. They need to see the person actually working with them.

And that way we feel that the internships are critical to facilitate access to employment for the kids. The evaluations are also critical to allow the kids to have a better sense about their career path, whether it is regular employment or self-employment.

It is critical to support the youth's interests and to work with the families to help them understand the importance of independence, the importance of employment, and the resources that are available for the kids to either pursue vocational training and/or employment path. In terms of trust, it's very important that the trust that is developed with the youth and that collaboration, so they understand the supports that are available to them and their own role in taking charge of the destiny and the life that they are going to lead.

We are looking forward this final year of operation of the Add Us In project to evaluate the cooperative models. And we have multiple agencies that are expressing their interest in trying to document how these cooperatives will work.

And we are exploring with VR how are we going to get the paperwork set up because of the emphasis on individual plans, and how can we move that vision about individual plans into more group kind of activities that will allow the students to collaborate and work together. So that's basically my presentation. And I will appreciate any comments that you may have. Thank you.

MS. LARSON: Thank you, Fabricio. And if anyone has any questions specifically for him, please do go ahead and put those into the chat box. Now we're going to hear from Jill Burgess and Dennis Gober. Jill is the central Oklahoma Add Us In project director at the University Oklahoma's National Center for Disability Education and Training. And Dennis is the division administrator for community-based youth services at the Office of Juvenile Affairs in Oklahoma. Thank you for being with us today, Jill and Dennis.

JILL BURGESS: Thank you. Thanks for the opportunity to present. And also to the audience, thanks for your participation today. We're going to talk about our successes within the AUI grant, in which it ends for central Oklahoma actually at the end of September. So we have some successes we would like to share with you all and also some lessons learned. But we're going to really talk about our partnerships because that has been an effective practice for us and continues to be.

And Dennis is going to talk about office of juvenile affairs, and his partnership with department of rehab services, and career tech. And then also talk about DRS and their partnership with the Oklahoma work. And then I'll finish up with the services that we have provided to our youth job seekers, and how we plan to transition that over, and what we're doing now, and when our AUI grant ends. So Dennis?

DENNIS GOBER: Good day, everybody. Thank you for attending the webinar here. And I'd like to tell you briefly about how the office of juvenile affairs tried to remove silos and successfully remove silos with other state agencies. And this was brought on through our communications that were founded, and fostered, and flourished during our Add Us In program.

One of the things that we found was when we were doing a self-examination, was that the young people in our institutions weren't being successful when they left there. We weren't preparing them well for the workforce. And we were having difficulties identifying programs for these kids.

And so the department of rehabilitative services and the office of juvenile affairs decided to embed VR counselors in our institutions. And through the evaluation process and through some collaborative efforts, we were able to start identifying kids, have them go through programs which helped foster their independent living skills. And so we made big strides in that, but we were still having a little bit of trouble when it came to workforce.

So we got to looking around a little bit more. And we did some talking to other people, believe it or not. I mean that's one thing that we all think that we're the experts in what we do, and we found that we didn't know what we were doing when it came to workforce as the state agency for juvenile delinquency. But we did find out that career techs had great programs that we could borrow and implement in our institutions.

And what we were looking for, we were looking to get transferable skills and a training program that would make our kids better candidates in the next phase of advanced manufacturing. And in Oklahoma one of the big things that you always hear about is oil. But over the last five years we've had a huge upspringing of windmills in the state of Oklahoma. And the wind turbines, they just cover the western part of the state.

And it's kind of mesmerizing to sit and watch those. And so we identified a group of young people that was interested in that, so that they could go out and see what they were like. So some of these kids were from inner city and they had never seen rural Oklahoma. And so taking them out to see the windmills was a great experience for them and a great experience for us. And it got them very excited about a full size, full scale windmill.

And we got to talking about it. And we got a miniature version of one, and we had them disassemble it, and go through it in a classroom setting. And slowly but surely we worked everything from about what is industrial safety, how to use measurement tools for everything from electrical to machinists and stuff like that, how to read the blueprints, how to interpret them. And then we turned them loose and we built a working turbine on our institutional grounds.

Now, it's not large like the 400-footers that are in western Oklahoma. But about 18 youth started the project. We had some attrition; we had some people fall out. But through this cooperation we built a wind turbine out there, and I say we, the youth did, that was able to sustain and produce electricity. Now it doesn't produce a whole lot, but it does produce enough that it runs the Christmas lights and some other electrical things that they do outside when we have some things going on there.

It was interesting to see that when state agencies decide that they don't know what's the most important thing for their state agency, for their kids, and they use other resources that are readily available, that the partnerships that they can form can produce some amazing results. And six of those kids that finished the project went out, and out of that three of those have gotten jobs. And I'm sorry, I'm blanking on the name of the company that they're with. But through DRS and the Gordon Cooper technology program and the Canadian Valley TECHNOLOGY CENTER, we were able to actually perform job placement. And they are making pretty good money right now working on something that they learned while they were in the institution.

I can't say enough about what Add Us In has allowed my state agency to do to recognize youth with disabilities. It's just been a very great growing process for us. And we really appreciate that. And with that I'm going to turn it back over to Jill so that she can finish it up for us.

MS. BURGESS: Thanks, Dennis. Along with that partnership there were others. We had a very large consortium and roughly about 17 agencies were represented at first. And so throughout these five years of Add Us In there's been multiple partnerships. I know that the Hispanic chamber of commerce is on our consortium.

And I think this is history-making, at least we're really excited about it. They are now a DRS provider. So the chamber itself is a DRS provider. The Oklahoma work and DRS, they will now have a VR counselor housed at the workforce center. So those are just some examples of our partnerships that really will sustain pieces of what Add Us In was about.

The services that our youth receive at the Oklahoma workforce centers, of course the soft skills, referrals to different resources out in the community. Businesses actually come into the workforce and interview our job seekers. We have them go through mock interviews, resume writing, cover letter writing, do assessments, and of course they receive one on one help. With Add Us In we had a dedicated youth career service counselor.

And with that ending, our job seekers are now transitioning over to a WIOA coach, which of course we're trying to wrap our heads around all the different changes. We did utilize WIA. And so now we're learning all the new things with WIOA. But it's just one more added piece that AUI is going to sustain itself. It might look a little different, but pieces of it have worked for us and I think will continue to work. And that is all that we have.

MS. LARSON: Thank you, Jill and Dennis. And now Carmen, I think you were going to go ahead and introduce our next speaker.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Sure. Thank you. So right now we're down to our last three speakers for this webinar. And we're highlighting the work that's been done as agency collaboration partnership in the state of New Hampshire. And we're also highlighting a participant success story.

We're going to have Kim Runion from the New Hampshire Department of Education who administer the WIA/WIOA funds; Katie Dichard who represents the New Hampshire jobs for America's graduates, they represent a provider; and Eric Woodard, he's a WIA out of school youth program participant, and he's going to talk to us a little bit about his journey in the program and where he is today. Kim?

KIM RUNION: Hi, everybody. Thank you for joining us. I just wanted to speak a little bit about the state level funding because I understand New Hampshire is slightly different than other states. The funding comes into the Department of Resource Economic Development for Office of Workforce Opportunity, and they subgrant the youth funds to the Department of Education. We then go through a competitive process as we're a one-WIB state. We go through a competitive process to release the funds out to agencies such as New Hampshire JAG to provide the direct services. And I'm going to turn it right over to Katie to talk about New Hampshire JAG.

KATIE DICHARD: OK. Well, first of all thank you all for having us present today and inviting us to participate. We are New Hampshire JAG. And many of our attendees viewing this presenting today may be familiar with jobs for America's graduates. We are part of a national organization in 32 states across the country. But as our slide indicates, New Hampshire JAG is a private nonprofit here in this state serving over 500 in school and out of school youth. Some of our programs are funded through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. But many are supported through school districts, state funds, and other grants or foundations.

We target any student who is facing one or more challenges in being successful in school or the workplace. New Hampshire JAG addresses both the dropout issue and the youth unemployment crisis by giving students who may not otherwise have such opportunities a chance to be successful in school or work.

And our goal really is to help disadvantaged youth become financially independent contributing citizens in their New Hampshire communities. We do this by providing paid work experiences to the youth and assisting them with other goals such as accessing training programs or college, and connecting them with employers in the community.

I listed some of the other key elements of our program on the slide you're viewing right now. Many of them are very similar to the other presenters' services that we heard about today. But I left off probably one of the most important components to our program and that is truly essential to the overall success of New Hampshire JAG. And that is the youth specialist who works in the classroom with the students on a daily basis. These specialists are not like a typical classroom teacher or even a common case worker.

They possess a variety of qualifications and skills, and use a creative and dynamic approach to reaching this disconnected population of students. The specialists are able to build quick rapport with all of the youth and immediately become their mentor, guidance counselor, and often just a voice of reason. They all have a genuine care and concern for the wellbeing of these young people, and are in positions to help identify root issues or underlying problems that might be affecting the students.

I think it's important to note that not all of the students we serve have a disability. But when they do, we don't treat them really any differently or provide any different services to them as we would any other participant in the program. All of the students we serve have some sort of challenge and it's our job to help them learn how to not let that challenge prevent them from doing what they want to do.

We can't cure the problem, but we will help them learn how to adapt and overcome those problems. In many cases it is our specialists who will recognize that there might be a disability. And we'll assist in getting the student the appropriate services, whether that be an evaluation or a referral to other program or treatment.

You're going to hear an example of this from our next speaker. Eric Woodard was in our New Hampshire JAG out of school program at Manchester Community College. He joined in 2010 after dropping out of high school and has come incredibly far since then. I think his story will give you a clear understanding of just what it is New Hampshire JAG is doing to help youth reach their full potential. Now I will turn things over to Eric.

ERIC WOODARD: Hello. I'm Eric. Several years ago I was lost and in a very dark place. I was 20 years old, unemployed and depressed. My world consisted of four walls and a bed. I had dropped out of school a few years earlier because I was bored with the classes, and more importantly bullied consistently on a daily basis because of a medical condition. Things got so bad that I was eventually hospitalized because of a suicide attempt.

At the time I was on permanent and total disability because of my depression. If I wanted to, I could have spent the rest of my life unemployed and feeling miserable. But I knew I had bigger goals for myself. I knew that I wanted the feeling of being financially independent and successful.

When I was released from the hospital, a friend who was attending Manchester Community College told my mother about a program that could potentially help me. When I searched the internet for New Hampshire JAG, I found the telephone number and immediately called.

(Inaudible) – answered and that began the beginning of a new life for me. Within a week I began classes with JAG at MCC. The atmosphere was very diverse. It made me feel like I was welcome. JAG helped me gain confidence, so much so that I became a member of youth voices. When I received my GED with JAG's help, I felt a feeling that I had never actually felt before, accomplishment.

Then things started to change in another positive way. In February of 2010, JAG helped me start an internship at the Manchester Police Department, working in dispatch and records division. That was an eye-opening experience. It helped me learn more about law enforcement and piqued my interest as well.

A year later as my internship was ending, I was offered a job at AlliedBarton security services, where I was employed for five years. In February of this year I started a new career at United Healthcare as a claims adjustment specialist. Although I am happy with my current employment situation, I feel there is always something more that I can accomplish.

I am still in school. I'm studying military history at Southern New Hampshire University. It is my dream to teach someday. That way I will have the opportunity to change the lives of students just as New Hampshire JAG has changed mine. Now at 26 my life is in a very different place than it was six years ago. I'm not longer unemployed and depressed, but happy to be working in a career field that I enjoy.

My world has expanded beyond the four walls and a bed where I once felt hopeless, and has expanded to see the vast amount of opportunities for success that exist in life. I'm on the right path now and I can proudly say New Hampshire JAG and its staff guided me to that new place. The JAG program saved my life. Thank you.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you so much, Eric. That was a great story. And congratulations on the successes that you've had. We're very proud of you. And so with that we conclude this section of our presenters. I want to thank all of them for their time, their energy, their knowledge, the models that they've shared this afternoon.

And at this point we're going to turn it over to the question and answer session. Right now we have a few questions in queue. And the first question we have right now is – and this goes back to the beginning of the presentation – "What is meant by state education agencies? Can you elaborate a bit?" Cassandra or Mindy, did you want to take that?

MS. LARSON: Sure. This is Mindy. And I think the question might be referring to the poll where we had different types of organizations you might be partnering with. And by state education agencies, we were referring to state departments of education. And so in the case of New Hampshire, here among our panelists, we have the New Hampshire Department of Education as a partner in this work with New Hampshire JAG. So we were just wondering whether others are working with state education.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Mindy. Our second question, and this goes to Fabricio, "What percentage do you think cause employers not to participate because of the MOU required 50 percent or hired at end; and were there employers who did not follow through?"

MR. BALCAZAR: Yeah. It's a great question, and I called my friends at YCCS. And there are two aspects to consider. The program is being sold to employers not only as an opportunity to have interns, but who have permanent employees. So that's why they are able to sign into the memorandum of understanding, understanding that the expectation is that they will try to hire as many of the kids as they feel they should hire. The minimum of course is the expectation of 50 percent.

But they told me that they have been very successful in presenting this vision to the employer, and very few people actually don't go along with this because they see three benefits for them. They get the cost of training the employees, whatever certification they need the program will pay for it. The kids get paid for eight weeks, which is a direct savings for the employer. And the program also covers the liability insurance.

So there are direct cost savings for the employers. I heard in a board report a few months ago that the Burger King reported that they have saved over $40,000 last year because of their involvement in the project, which is a significant amount.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Great. Thank you, Fabricio. We have a follow-up question as well. "Are there any concerns with providing interns to private employers, thus subsidizing their business? Is there an agreement to hire the intern at the conclusion of the work experience?"

MR. BALCAZAR: We want to subsidize their business. Yes. That's part of the deal. And that's part of the memorandum of understanding. Yes. We want to save money, help the business save money, the cost of training, the cost of the on the job training. Yes. Because that's how we feel that the employers who have never been exposed to having people with disabilities around are going to demystify their stigma.

So yes. We want to give them as much benefit so they could see the gains directly. They are in business, so we want to make sure that they see the benefit of going and participating in our program.

Somebody is asking us about the success rate. And I checked with them and so far this year the success rate is 38 percent of youth who have been employed. And this is still ongoing. And there are some kids that those were the kids that completed the 90 days requirement from VR. But there are several more that are in the process of reaching that goal. So the charter is hopeful that we will be able to meet the 50 percent threshold for this year, which is very good.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Wonderful. So Fabricio, it looks as though most of the questions are geared towards your presentation. "The following noted that two of the three employers mentioned were fast food. Were there interns exposed to professional occupations within the fast food industry? Or was this mainly experience in food services?"

MR. BALCAZAR: Yeah. It was food service because of the nature of their age and the fact that they were still finishing high school. But we were informed that one of the kids that has performed at Burger King in one of the offices was promoted to supervisor. So we are very excited and we are trying to schedule right now an interview with him on the side, because we are trying to tell about some of these stories and how these stories happen.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Oh, wonderful. The following question, Fabricio, what were the success rates and full employment achieved for the programs – I think we covered that actually. So we're done with your questions, Fabricio. But we have one for Jill and for Dennis. Could either one of you talk or elaborate a bit more on the Add Us In project and what it entailed?

MS. BURGESS: Sure. Add Us In was a demonstration grant from the Office of Disability Employment Policy at Department of Labor. And the eight grantees were awarded. There were four for the first year, which Oklahoma was part of that, and then four starting the second go around. And each of the grantees are all set up differently as far as who they're serving and if they're doing it statewide, whatever.

For Oklahoma, we are set up to be an all-inclusive. We work with all youth and adults, with all different types of disabilities. The goal for our project was to work with minority employers to outreach to them in hiring our youth and adults. We do that through the Central Oklahoma Workforce Investment Board, through the Hispanic chamber, and through Freedom Oklahoma, the diversity business association, which is an LGBT organization. And those three partners have business service consultants that go and outreach to businesses.

On the provider side we work with (rescare ?), which provides a youth and an adult career coordinator that works with our job seekers. And we connect both parties. We get together and when the business services outreach to business and there are positions, they immediately let the youth and adult coaches know that these jobs are available. And we go through and try to match for employment. So that's basically what the Oklahoma Add Us In grant is about.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you so much, Jill. Moving on, we have a question here and I think this is for Oz. "What tips can you give for outreaching to employers about hiring this demographic?"

MS. MONDEJAR: Yes. Thank you for asking. So there are a couple of ways that I would suggest you approach it. One is to really understand the mission and the vision of the organization, the employer itself. It will give you some insight as to what they look for in terms of their employee body, and really to personalize it with writing to either the chief operating officer or the president with a copy to human resources.

A lot of these organizations may not have a robust human resources organization, so you may want to start with the top, and just introducing your programs, and what support system you offer them in terms of recruiting and retaining the community that you serve. And look at some of the job makeup of their organization. So get to know the business, get a contact beyond HR, and really be able to express how you are able to support the recruiting and the retention process.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Wonderful. Thank you, Oz. And keep the questions coming. We have a couple more questions. This question is for Eric. "Eric, you indicated that you were bored in school. What were the key elements that sparked your interest when you entered the JAG program?"

MR. WOODARD: Like I said in what I was saying, that it was a very diverse atmosphere, there was individualized attention. Any issues that I had had with school in high school, I didn't have them in the JAG program. And any problems I had with work, that was addressed immediately. I didn't have to wait for an answer or anything like that. It just clicked.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Great. Thank you, Eric. Another question, and I believe this is for either Fabricio or for Jill or Dennis. "Are there any particular research studies or papers that the Chicago or central Oklahoma or MC found useful when deciding how to design and develop the programs?"

MR. BALCAZAR: I would like to refer people to the national transition clearing house because there is a whole giant resource of people nationwide who are doing extensive reviews of transition research, what works, best practices. So yeah. There is a lot of information out there about best practices in transition that should be available and are available.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Fabricio. And I want to remind the audience that in your resources packet you'll see a little bullet in it that talks about Add Us In initiatives. There's a link in there that you can get additional information. One of the attachments on today's webinar is the biographical information on each one of the presenters. There's also contact information in there as well. So hopefully you'll use that information.

Another question that just came in, and I believe this is for Mindy. "Would you be able to walk us through a typical participant flow to cover the guideposts from slide number 10?"

MS. LARSON: Sure. So what I wanted to let you know is we actually have two profiles on our website that can be helpful for illustrating how the guideposts have been used in practice. One is from the state of Maryland and one is from the state of South Carolina. So I'm just going to say a little bit about how Maryland has used it. The Maryland Department of Education's division of rehabilitation services has supported a project called Maryland seamless transition collaborative.

And basically there's a partnership between local schools who were part of a demonstration initially, and the division of rehabilitation services. The students with disabilities are identified in the school, and connected with rehabilitation services, counselors who meet with them in the school and connect with them while they're still in secondary school, to help them develop a plan related to their goals and interests.

So there's assessment around interests, both career-wise and post-secondary education-wise. The individualized support includes helping them identify what skills they need and what work experiences they might want to pursue to develop towards their post-secondary education and career goals. And then helping them obtain work experiences in the community through partnerships with employers. And helping them explore post-secondary education options so that they are able to make informed decisions about what they want to do after high school.

So I am going to share a link in the chat box. Hopefully we can get that to you so that folks can take a closer look at both the Maryland and the South Carolina partnership examples using the guideposts for success. It breaks down how all of the components of the guideposts are being incorporated into the practices by the various partners that are involved.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, Mindy. And I just want to share with regards to a prior presenter, Fabricio, you can also check out the Workforce3One link as well that will have these slides and will have additional resources for you to access. You can also Google search workforce system strategies always works as well. It might bring up additional examples and models.

So with that we have one more question. And this is any tips for when you have full buy in from employer in the local facility, but the corporate office who is usually out of state says no. Oz, can you take this one?

MS. MONDEJAR: Sure. It's a very good question. Business is always local. So I would challenge the corporate office in a way that's respectful. But I think you need some local champions that can help you tell the story.

And the chambers of commerce can be helpful in this area when you look at the community outreach from each of the businesses wherever they're housed. Because you're absolutely right; out of sight, out of mind. And business is local once again, so you have to tell the holistic story on a local basis, why it's important for organizations to recruit from a diverse workforce, which in fact includes individuals with disabilities.

If their mission or vision does not include that, then I would point it out. Because I think they'd be very, very remiss if they didn't think about it more thoroughly. It's dynamic because the corporate offices often don't dictate what you do locally. I'd be surprised because that happens frequently. But it's worth addressing. Certainly if whoever asked the question would like to speak offline, I'm more than happy to have a deeper discussion.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Great. Thank you, Oz. I hope you're receiving the information that Mindy referred to. There's a couple of links up that you can access as well. This concludes our portion for question and answers.

And if we could bring up the resources slide, please. I just wanted to point out a couple, a few resources for you to access with the training and employment guidance letters, vision for the workforce system and initial implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Of course if you again do a Google search and type in WIOA, you can get the full array of information. You also get the U.S. DOL's website where you can access a lot of this information.

A couple of things, we have the Add Us In initiative site on here that you can actually access some of the other grantees that are participating in ODEP's initiatives. The partners for youth with disabilities, this was shared with us by Oz and his group, which he talked to earlier during his presentation; and also Project SEARCH, which a lot of us know about, but again accessible information.

With that I want to remind you that this webinar series, Enough is Known for Action, is a monthly webinar series focused on youth programs. And our next webinar will focus on career pathways. And that's scheduled for August 26th. Any of my presenters want to say anything before we log off?

MS. LARSON: Thank you to everyone. It was a great way to actually hear what's happening around the country in both local communities and states. So I really appreciate all our presenters.

MS. RODRIGUEZ: Thank you, everyone.

(END)