**Workforce 3One**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**H-1B Ready to Work**

**Breaking Down the Barriers: Helping the Long-Term Unemployed Overcome Obstacles and Secure Jobs**

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BRIAN KEATING: All right. Well, without any further ado, I'm going to turn things over to our moderator and facilitator today, Megan Baird. Megan is with the ETA Division of Strategic Investments. Megan, take it away.

MEGAN BAIRD: All right. Thanks, Brian. Hi, everyone. Welcome to today's webinar, which is part of our long-term unemployed subject matter expert webinar series. And today's topic in the series is called "Breaking Down the Barriers: Helping the Long-Term Unemployed Overcome Obstacles and Secure Jobs."

And again, my name is Megan Baird from the Department of Labor's Division of Strategic Investments, and joining me today is Ayreen Calimquim and Jen Swidler. They are with High Impact Partners, our technical assistance providers for the Ready to Work grants. We hope you are just as excited as we are today to hear from our subject matter expert on the long-term unemployed, and now I'll turn things over to Jen who is going to get us started. Jen?

JEN SWIDLER: Great. Thank you, Megan. And thanks, everyone, for attending our second Ready to Work subject matter expert series webinar today. Please help me welcome our subject matter expert guest speaker, Ofer Sharone. Ofer is assistant professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management. His research focuses on career transitions, job searching, and unemployment.

His recently published book entitled "Flawed System, Flawed Self: Job Searching and Unemployment Experiences" has won several book of the year awards and received wide attention from national media and policy makers. Ofer is also the founder of the Institute for Career Transitions, which provides pro bono job search support to long-term unemployed. We're really happy to have him join us today, and we'll be hearing from him in just a minute.

We'll be covering a lot of great information today. We have three main takeaways that you could be gleaning from the sessions, which include being better-equipped to recognize and address the unique challenges the long-term unemployed population faces in networking and navigating the hiring process, further understanding the differences between working with the long-term unemployed and other unemployed job seekers, and learning strategies on how to work with this population, helping them overcome the challenges they may face, and getting them back into the workplace.

We'll have time at the end of the webinar today to answer your questions, but in the meantime please use the chat function on your screen and type your questions at any time during the webinar. We'll be answering them at the end. Anything we don't have time to cover today we'll be revisiting during the roundtable discussion next week.

OK. Before I turn it over to Ofer to get started with the presentations, we'd like to know who's on the call with us today. If you haven't done so already, please take a minute to answer the polling question that's on your screen.

MR. KEATING: All right. And we're bringing that up now. I know some of you actually voted before the webinar began, but we're bringing that back up. You should see a place to click a radio button on your screen. So again we want to know who's on the call today. So using this polling window, go ahead and select the role that you play in your H-1B Ready to Work grant. For this grant initiative you are either the authorized representative, perhaps you're the program director or manager. You might be IT or a data manager or staff. You could be a training partner, an employer partner, or a service provider.

And go ahead and vote. Looks like a few of you just did. We'll give you another maybe 30 seconds. So go ahead and click one of those radio buttons that fits your role, and if you want to give us more context, we also have the welcome chat that's still open. So feel free to introduce yourself or give us additional feedback on who you are in that welcome chat. All right. Great.

MS. SWIDLER: Great.

MR. KEATING: All right. And it looks like most people have voted or majority or – so I'll turn it back to the team. All right. And we'll just move on. So I'll take that down and back to you, Jen.

OFER SHARONE: So at this point I'd like to come in. This is Ofer Sharone, and I want to thank you, Jen and Megan and Ayreen and Brian for all the work you've been doing to set this up. And I want to say good afternoon to everyone around the country. It's really an honor to speak with you, and I want to thank you for all the work that you do to support the long-term unemployed, currently one of the most marginalized group in American society and certainly needing much support.

So I'm going to start my talk spending two minutes on just kind of situating us in the historical moments with a few statistics and then get into the meat of my presentation, which is based on more qualitative data beyond the numbers. But you can see in this slide that today we are with 28 percent of the unemployed being long-term unemployed, significantly higher than it was before the great recession.

And in fact this is the highest level of long-term unemployment as a percentage of the unemployed. The only time we reached this level before the great recession was in the Great Depression, so we're looking at six-decade high level. Despite some improvements, we're still in crisis territory. So this remains a very urgent issue to think about and to work on.

I also want to talk about who is long-term unemployed, and there's a lot of misconceptions I think around the role of education and some stereotypes perhaps. So in fact once unemployed, the risk of becoming long-term unemployed cuts across all levels of education. If you're college educated, if you have a PhD, or if you have a high school degree or below, the risk of becoming long-term unemployed once you're unemployed are very similar.

And Jen mentioned in the intro that I work with long-term unemployed job seekers directly through the Institute for Career Transitions. And we have lots of people with PhDs, some from my own alma mater or the place I teach at MIT, and they are having very difficult time finding a job.

One of the important predictors, risk factors is age. So if we look at the percentage of the unemployed who are long-term unemployed for people 55 and over, it's 45 percent. So 28 percent is for the general population of all ages, but the – it's much higher for people who are older. Their risk of becoming stuck in long-term unemployed becomes much greater.

In thinking about other factors here, what creates the trap of long-term unemployment, we have a bunch of recent studies that are in the form of audit studies where resumes are – or applications are sent out to real job postings by researchers which holds everything constant except the duration of unemployment. And we see that the duration by itself becomes its own barrier.

So there is outright discrimination or definitely preferential treatment given for people who are not long-term unemployed over the unemployed resulting in what lots of people who are long-term unemployed call "the black hole." People are telling me all the time that they keep applying for tens, hundreds of jobs and there's absolutely no response. And we think part of the black hole phenomena that long-term unemployed talk about is because of discriminatory practices in the hiring.

So looking beyond the numbers – and this is really my research expertise is based on qualitative in-depth interviews – I want to sum up the experiential essence of being long-term unemployed as apart from being any kind of unemployed, short-term unemployed is that there is the experience of a series of rejections. So this is what I think really makes this different.

There's an external stigma to being unemployed and particularly being long-term unemployed that's part of why we have the discrimination against the unemployed I talked about in the last slide. And over time with this series of rejections over and over and over – and that's by definition the experience of someone who's long-term unemployed – what tends to happen is that the external stigma gets internalized. People often begin to feel like something is wrong with them, that they're not getting a job. They begin to engage in what we call self-blame, and this is particularly strong among white-collar workers. And I think that fits many of the H-1B program workers you'll be dealing with.

So why do we focus so much on self-blame and internalized stigma is because it's fundamental to everything we care about. Effective job search is very difficult to engage in if you're feeling that something is wrong with you, and your confidence is shattered. Often what happens over time with self-blame and internalized stigma is people become discouraged, drop out of the labor force, and in fact today we have a labor force participation that's at a 30-year low.

There's lots of things driving that, but certainly a significant part is people dropping out because they become too discouraged. And I'm going to later relate that to the self-blame, internalized stigma. And there's also a lot of research connecting this experience of self-blame to the physical and mental health risks that come with unemployment. And I know your last speaker, David Bluestein [ph], addressed a lot of the mental health risk that come with unemployment. So I'm not going to focus on that per se, but it's part of this bigger picture.

So when I get long-term unemployed job seekers into an interview room and they develop some sense of trust in me as an empathetic listener, these are the things that people share. For example, "The hardest thing is feeling that there's something wrong with me," or, "The hardest thing is esteem, confidence. It's killed. I've turned into an introvert. I feel like I've gotten older." This I feel like I've become an introvert is something that I hear multiple times from job seekers, and it's interesting when I work with coaches, coaches will often say long-term unemployed are generally introverted types.

And I say, well, you haven't seen them over time. Many of them did not start out introverted. The experience of being rejected over and over is part of what creates a manifested behavior that looks like introvert. It's not necessarily, though, a deep character but something that arises in this context.

So what is self-blame, and what's the causes? It's really important to understand what causes the self-blame in order to then think about what is the appropriate way to address it in support. So that's why I'm going to spend some minutes on this issue. So first of all, what is self-blame? It the exaggerated attribution of the negative outcomes in the labor market to something about yourself and the overlooking of all the other structural, contextual factors like the job market that are also contributing to your difficulty in finding a job.

Now, often people are experiencing self-blame even though they're cognitively aware of the existence of other obstacles like age discrimination or simply not there being enough jobs. But even though they're aware cognitively, the overall emotional experience they're having is something is wrong with me.

So where does that come from? One answer has been that it's our culture, that Americans are highly individualistic and therefore in this individualistic cultural environment, if something negative happens to us, we blame our self. This – I want to tell you this is not correct. They've done a lot of research, and I'm happy that it's not correct because, if it were correct, we would feel much more helpless to do anything about it. Culture is something very difficult to change. But we know this is an oversimplified and – (inaudible) – explanation because research shows us that people use a mixture of individualistic and structural understanding of why they're having a hard time in their career.

So it's not the case that people always self-blame, and there's actually a pattern across a bunch of research studies. We see that when we ask people why did you lose your job, what happened with your layoff, people usually give you a structural explanation. They'll talk about the downturn in the economy. They'll talk about outsourcing. They'll talk about new technology, all kinds of attributions that are not about themselves.

So we're not culturally incapable of doing or having the understanding, but there's something interesting when we ask the question of why you're having a hard time finding a new job, then that's where you see more individualized understanding that grow more and more individualized over time. So all that suggests that there's something really important in the job search process and the experience of job searching that makes us vulnerable to self-blame, and it's something that can be addressed through support.

So very briefly, some research showing what's unique about the job search experience of the American white-collar workers we're working with. So some research I did of cross-national comparisons with Israel, Israel is just a convenient comparative case because there's lots of structural similarities in terms of job market, the unemployment benefits, and yet very different subjective reactions to unemployment. Israelis generally and overwhelmingly do not blame themselves, but they blame the system.

You can see a typical reaction of an Israeli who's otherwise very similar to the Americans' life studies but the response of one having the interpretation of the obstacles, I'm not going to get a job because the system is a meat market. It does not look at you as an individual. You're just buzzwords as compared to the kind of narrative I hear from the American job seeker about I'm not a good interviewer. I'm a bad networker.

And then over time, particularly for long-term unemployed, things like I feel like I'm flawed in some way, like I have a character defect. Those are the very painful kind of reflections people share with me, usually after they have a lot of trust in me as an interviewer.

So what's explaining the difference? Why do we see this kind of self-blame more in the United States? We have to look at the experience people have when they're job searching, and what's distinct about the American competence of job searching. So these are just kind of shorthands (sic); the specs game versus the chemistry game.

These are matters of relative emphasis and general – and there's some generalization in my statement, but hiring in Israel I'm calling the specs game. People feel evaluated based on skills or proxies of skills. So there's a lot of unfairness going on, skills that are – can be judged by your gender, by your age, all kinds of things that people feel are unfair. But the basic understanding is the employer's trying to get at skill using often these kind of proxies and shortcuts.

The chemistry game in the U.S., particularly this is for white-collar workers, is different. Here the focus is on establishing fit. Finding a job requires fit. The skills matter of course as a threshold; right? So you can't even apply to a bunch of jobs unless you have the threshold requirements of skills. But one you make that cut, it's really the focus is on the person behind the skills. Are they a good fit? And each of these processes create different experiences.

So in the specs game in Israel people feel like they're getting arbitrarily and rigidly excluded. In the U.S. in the chemistry game people feel very vulnerable to personalized rejection. So we can just see it in every step of the job search, with resumes. In Israel it's just a list. In the U.S. there's a lot of crafting going on, careful editing like it's an advertisement, but they're trying to convey the intangible of self.

American cover letters are meant to be self-revealing. What is it about you, the unique person, that makes you the perfect fit for our organization? Networking is at the heart of American white-collar job searching, and it's really all about creating rapport. It's not people going around saying, hey, look at my skills and credentials. It's saying, let's meet for coffee and let me get to know you as a person.

And then the ultimate moment of the search comes in these interviews that many jobs here in the U.S. describe as a first date. So what's the implication of all that? When there's a high degree of this chemistry game element to job search, when a lot is about interpersonal fit, two implications.

One is the job seeker perceives that much of this should be in their control; right? So this is like a game that if you're losing it, it's something about how you're playing it; right? You should be able to connect, to present yourself well. And if you're not, then this is when people start to think there's something wrong about how I'm job searching and then over time something wrong with me.

And this is the second point, that because the assessment here is not just of the list of specs but also lots of focus on chemistry, on fit, people begin to feel like the rejection is of something deeper about them, not just their skill.

So people that I interview talked about how every stage of the job search makes them feel very vulnerable. "Resumes are the hardest things to write. It taps my identity, my pride, my fears. Putting myself out there to be judged is pretty heavy," right, because it's the self that's getting evaluated not simply the skills and credentials.

Or, "I find networking hard to do. There's hesitation about calling people and putting myself out there. Just difficult." It's difficult because networking requires you to reach out in a very personalized and therefore vulnerable way and with a real fear that the rejection will happen and people will take it personally.

OK. So this is why American job searching is so tough, particularly when it becomes long-term unemployment, and now we'll turn to what we might be able to do about it. So a lot of the vulnerability arises from the way hiring happens, but self-blame is not inevitable. And I'm going to focus on support practices, and I'm going to distinguish traditional self-help support and more sociologically-informed support. And you'll see what that means in a second.

So the typical forms of support that I've observed in research is very good at providing strategic advice about how to play the chemistry game. So most job search support that I've seen understands and is able to explain, for example, why networking is so important, why creating rapport is so important, why getting referrals, how to conduct an interview. So strategy is there. The two levels where I think there is problems with the typical support that's provided are the following.

The first is there tends to be a focus on magnifying the job-seeker's perceived control. So often career coaches or people running support programs, with the best intention, want to make the job seeker feel empowered. So they say things like, yes. You can take control of this job search. You can master your own career destiny. You can make your dreams come true, if you just master networking and cover letter writing techniques. If you go forth with passion, all the obstacles will melt away.

All these are different ways to convey to the job seeker that it's fully in their control, with the intended effect of making people feel inspired and empowered. But unfortunately for someone's who's long-term unemployed – and this is where it could be different if you're dealing with someone that's just laid off or short-term unemployed, but someone who has been rejected repeatedly for six months or longer, the message that it's all in your control has the boomerang effect.

It's not often empowering but the opposite and puts more emphasis to them on something must be wrong with me. If it's all in my control and I'm not getting a job, then what's wrong with me? And this is something I heard over and over from job seekers.

The second shortcoming in the way support is often provided is the focus on positive self-presentation in the support context, which ends up intensifying emotional isolation. So of course when we interview, when we network, we need to be our best self, our most positive self, and so it's very important to try to create those positive emotions for self-presentation for the key moment of networking and interview.

Now, how do we get there? So I think it's a mistake to think of the support context as a space where job seekers should practice their positivity, meaning – and I've seen this happen too many times where support becomes a place that's fully focused on networking with the other job seekers and practicing being very positive.

The problem with asking job seekers to only convey positive emotions when they're in the support setting is that it leaves them often with no place to fully share the full range of what's going on for them, the positive and the negative emotions. And if you're long-term unemployed, negative emotions are going to be there, and it's only a question of whether they're allowed to be expressed or not.

And unfortunately, often in families, there is no room to express that, or people don't feel comfortable sharing that. So the outcome of that is that job seekers feel very alone in their negative experience, and it becomes one more way in which they feel like they're a failure. They assume nobody else is having these strong negative emotions of self-blame, of internalized stigma, and so they're alone in their emotional turmoil.

So how do we change this? We conducted some research last year where we took a bunch of long-term unemployed job seekers, asked them before they got any support to describe their emotional state with a question about I feel like there's something wrong with me that I'm not getting a job. And the majority of them said they agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. Then after 10 weeks of support, we managed to cut that number in half where the control group that didn't get the support, their level of self-blame remained as high or higher.

So what did this support do that reduced self-blame? It replaced the discourse about you are in control with a discourse that recognized that, yes. You are partly in control. What you do matters, and yet there are also barriers beyond your control, including we talked very openly about things like discrimination against the long-term unemployed so that people are equipped to understand the kinds of obstacles they're dealing with, meaning that when they get the rejection after rejection after rejection, it's not something about them or something necessarily that they're doing wrong in their search but that there are obstacles that require making this – this will require more time and more persistence, and they should focus on the things in their control while being aware of the things outside their control.

We also encouraged people to fully share their emotional experiences. We were very clear this is not therapy. This is not interwork. We're not going to try to do the work of therapists. What it is is a safe space where there's enough trust here that you can share everything that's going on for you in the way you would with a good friend and then you can recognize that you're not alone and others will support you in the way you need to be supported. So we can think about this as shifting from self-blame to self-revaluation and kind of looking more closely at some of the mechanisms that what helps people move from self-blame.

I'm going to talk very briefly about each of the shared emotional crisis – understanding the shared nature of the emotional crisis, recognizing the merits of similar others, recognizing their own merits, the value of others in the group, and the numbers game perspective. So this is maybe paradoxical, but when people recognize that everybody else is feeling the same way, basically feeling very blue, there's an encouraging element to it because it's not just you.

So one quote I'll read off, "The thing is you just know you're not alone, and the emotional feelings you have are not yours alone. These other people have them." So this recognition of the shared emotional crisis shifts the focus away from it's something about me and applaud or weaken our self. It makes it more apparent that there are structural reasons why this kind of experience is happening.

A second thing that goes on here is job seekers internalize the stigma of long-term unemployed about themselves and about their fellow long-term unemployed. And the support group can help people recognize first that the others in the group are people with lots of skills and merits.

So, for example, one job seeker said, when you're in this group with people, you realize there's two lawyers. There's a marketing profession. There are all these people with all these skills, and they're also having trouble finding stuff for whatever reason. It just helps you feel better about yourself. So this is different from the recognition of everyone is in the emotional crisis.

It's here seeing other long-term unemployed people as very accomplished professionals allows you to then see yourself in a new way; right? It opens the door to recognizing that maybe it is external barriers because even if these other people I'm seeing who are very skilled are having a hard time, then maybe people who are very – then maybe I am also someone with great skills and having a hard time.

Another practice that was helpful was – this is a more standard practice I think in job search that – support. Job seekers are asked to think about their past – (inaudible) – and this is – intention is often to help them know what to say in that working situation or even what to write on a resume. There is also though a deeper benefit to this that we learned from the research about how excavating those past successes help people come up with an internal narrative about who they are that kind of counters the default narrative that developed over time with long-term unemployment.

The numbers game perspective comes by recognizing openly the barriers like discrimination against the long-term unemployed, which then diminishes self-blame. So here's one quote. Before it was more feeling of futility of thing, going into black holes in the internet when applying for jobs but now it's just a matter of hanging in there and continuing with the process and continuing with the slow and at some point things will connect.

The recognition here is just – it's not just me. It's not just that there's something wrong with me or that I'm doing something wrong, that there's a larger structure. There are obstacles. These obstacles can be overcome, but it will take time. It will take persistence, and so it's not just a black hole.

OK. Finally, there is the experience of helping others in the group turned out to be very helpful to people revaluating themselves, feeling like I'm part of a group. I'm feeling like I'm helping others there with my thoughts and giving them my responses or concerning how they feel. This is also helpful in combatting the internalized stigma. One limitation of the group that came up a few times was people self-discouraged by seeing others in the group who were even longer-term unemployed than they were.

So this person, for example, said the group is not a good place for me because they've all been out of work a long time, which got me down. Some of them have been out of work for eight years. That's not motivating me in my situation. So it was literally terrifying for this person who was two years unemployed to see others who could be eight years unemployed. This is something I think to think about in kind of group structure and dynamic. It was a limitation we saw.

OK. So now, I'm in the final just kind of summary mode. Long-term unemployed that you encounter are feeling under-confident, are blaming themselves, are feeling stuck in a black hole. What can we do to help? One of my take-home messages, in addition to just providing good strategies, focus on this revaluation of the self, ways to reduce the self-blame. With strong self-blame you cannot be an effective networker. You cannot be an effective interviewer, and you may very well not continue with the job search and you will stop searching. So this dimension of things is very important to pay attention to.

And how do we facilitate revaluation? Managing the message about the degree of control the job seekers have is very important. Not overstating it that it's all in their control because this will boomerang and people will blame themselves even more. Setting the expectation that this is going to be a marathon not a sprint is really important.

The time expectations people bring into the process really shapes their experience of it. If you think you're going to get a job in two weeks, then four months seems like an endless stretch, and the process is not working. If the stage is set that this is something that takes months, then two months into it you feel like, hey, I'm just getting in – I'm in the middle of it. We talked about space and time to share a range of emotions to reduce isolation.

In the group work I would create opportunities for people to help each other. That will help them feel better about themselves. I will create chances for people to learn about the merits, about the skills of the other people around them, and I will create opportunities for people to develop a new narrative about themselves, so recognizing all their past successes.

At this point I wanted to fairly discuss but is really important is these other relationships outside the support context. Friends and marriages are often very strained by long-term unemployment, and yet they are invaluable sources of social support for your clients. So I would address the issue of how to help job seekers improve these relationships.

And often what goes on here, it's complex of course, but a very typical dynamic is that the well-intentioned friend or family member will be giving lots of advice to the unemployed person. And the unemployed person hears that as criticism and as patronizing. But they've never sat down and said to their family member or friend, look, when I need advice, I'll ask you for advice; what I actually really need is for you to listen. I need someone to share my experiences with. I need support, or I need introductions to people who could be a referral. Or I need to have fun with you. So helping people have those conversations with their potential social support from friends or marriages is fairly important.

And this is my last slide, how to facilitate networking because we know networking is so key to be able to kind of pierce through a lot of those discriminatory biases we – employers have about the long-term unemployed. It's simply not enough to tell people to go out there and network. So I think we have a lot of research showing that that message is important, but it's not enough.

There is a lot of resistance doing it because it's emotionally very vulnerable, and people fear rejection. They fear looking like a loser. So I think it is helpful and this is a common practice but a good one to set very clear target goals about networking and to have accountability around them but also to try to find contexts where it's easier to meet others as peers.

So Hackathons is a good example where a job seeker can volunteer, and there's next to him or her is a volunteer who is currently working in the same field. They can meet as colleagues as opposed to as a networker and a networkee and where the power relations are clear and where there's a lot of vulnerability and kind of nervous energy.

So this is a more authentic, perhaps easier, more organic way to meet people. And I wish I had more examples, but I think good support should be thinking about these sorts of opportunities to meet other people in an – that's not just an official networking kind of meeting.

So I think I am at the end of my prepared remarks, and we're going to I guess move now to some questions.

AYREEN CALIMQUIM: Great. Thank you so much, Ofer. This is Ayreen Calimquim with High Impact Partners, and I just wanted to – before we open it up to the question and answer portion, we did want to know quickly your feedback on the information that Ofer provided during this webinar. The first response could be the webinar provided strategies that I can implement in my Ready to Work program. The information provided ideas that I can use to help my long-term unemployed clients succeed in my Ready to Work program, or C, provided new information to add to my knowledge on the long-term unemployed.

And with this slide really just want to make sure that we can really determine what your needs are and how we can continue to support you throughout your grant.

There were a few things – oh, there is a comment that it would be great if we could respond to all three on this poll. Certainly respond in your – in the chat function, if you do agree that all these three options apply to you.

The second piece to this polling question, certainly something you could also add to the chat function, is are there strategies that are – that you are currently using that was not mentioned in today's webinar? And if so, please include them in the chat window.

MR. KEATING: Absolutely. And thanks for that feedback. I think we intentionally wanted folks to know whether your top feedback was if you got strategies, ideas, or information added today's webinar. But like Ayreen mentioned, we certainly want to hear from you if you wanted to vote for all three and wanted to give us further context about any of those answers that you chose.

Also you'll notice – thanks for the – those of you who have already participated in the chat. I know we've got some questions for you. So if you were busy listening to today's presentation and weren't following along with that, you can scroll back and see what open-ended questions we've already provided to you. And then we want to just go ahead and invite you to respond to this question in the chat. And again, that question is are there strategies you are currently using that were not mentioned during today's webinar?

And if so, go ahead and type them right into this chat window. And we're also going to be inviting you, like we have been threatening and promising, to give you your chance to participate over the phone as well. So, Ayreen, just let me know when we're ready to do that. And I know we've got some great feedback that's already come in, and we can certainly start there as well.

MS. CALIMQUIM: Great. Thank you so much for that, Brian.

We do have a couple things that I want to start from the beginning. We did get some feedback from Danielle in the question, Danielle from Westchester. The question was, "Are there any of these strategies that Ofer has provided that you currently utilize?" And Danielle's response that we do allow room for participants to ventilate their experiences and their negative emotions, and this was done through a structured boot camp environment, structured setting. So certainly, Danielle, if you are open to talking a little bit more about that, we could certainly open it up to you. Let us know.

There is the fourth – the specific question, Ofer, "Does this approach have an associated curriculum or training? And has this approach lead to higher employment?"

MR. SHARONE: Yeah. So I'll take the second part of that first. In the pilot study we did, we did have a higher rate or reemployment for the people who got the support than for the control group. It was actually almost double. The reason I didn't mention that is because the numbers, it was not a big enough group for this to be statistically significant. So we're not going out there and wanting to make too big a claim about this.

So we do believe that if you have reduced self-blame, you will see higher reemployment rates and we have this data but it's not big enough to make that claim conclusively. But regarding the reduced self-blame, the numbers were very strong and significant, and we have a lot of good qualitative data about how it happened which I presented to you.

In terms of the training, this is something that I would be open to doing and perhaps through the DOL organize some kind of longer training for along these lines. If there's interest, we could develop something. It's not something I've done in the past.

MS. CALIMQUIM: Great. Thank you so much, Ofer. Are there any other questions? It looks like a few folks are typing in. I do want to open it up to Jen who may also have some follow-up questions. And so while we cover these, certainly please continue to type in your questions.

MS. SWIDLER: Hi. Thank you, Ayreen. Ofer, long-term unemployed people know that employers may have a stigma against them for being unemployed long-term. How do you prepare an individual for an interview with an employer that may have a bias against them?

MR. SHARONE: Great question. So first thing I would say is this requires a lot of interview practice. I've observed many job seekers who are – have great answers to lots of very tricky interview questions about their skills and experiences, but then when they're asked, so tell me what have you been doing the last six months, they freeze and they look like a deer caught in the headlights because it's a very emotionally laden question. And so the first way to deal with this I think is to practice that answer so many times that it becomes as routine as answering tell me about yourself or tell me about your last job.

The other thing I would say is that employers bias comes from this stigmatized stereotypical views of who is long-term unemployed and who gets stuck in that situation. And so I think I would, as a job seeker – even if I'm not asked, I would proactively address the elephant in the room and say, yes. There's a – whatever the case is, my – the industry I was in was decimated, and there was simply not a lot of jobs in this position for me in the past year, and I'm really – (inaudible) – when opening up or something that contextualizes the job seeker and talks about what they have been doing.

They have been doing any kind of consulting or any kind of volunteer work, any kind of upgrading of their skills, it fills up that gap in the employer's mind and so I think kind of demystifies that period. So this is what I would really urge people to do. Lots of practice on that question.

MS. SWIDLER: Great. Thank you so much, Ofer. Ayreen, do we have any other questions from the group?

MS. CALIMQUIM: It sounds like someone else might be typing. So we'll leave some time for that to come through. Debra did share that they have an affinity networking sessions for two to three weeks with all the participants, and then they eventually move on to a training session. And so within that – having that shared experience leaves – they have a graduation ceremony to celebrate their experience.

And then another – so Heather's question was, "We have a mental health provider come in to be a guest speaker in a job club to talk about the effects of LTU and the family. Are there any ideas around that?"

MR. SHARONE: Yeah. OK. So first, let me just say whoever said they had two or three weeks of stimulated group and then graduation and somebody else mentioned – I think it was Danielle – a boot camp, both of those are great because they are highly bonding time of activities and events that create a lot of social solidarity and emotional support. People get to know each other in those kind of settings much better than if they're only coming in for a couple hours here and there. So I think that's a tremendous way to deal with emotional support.

The question about family dynamics, there are – this is a tough issue. So a lot of marriages become strained, and I think, though, there are few kind of typical dynamics that unfold in families.

And so at least to address as a group those typical things that come up, even if you can't deal with the particular of every single individual, I think would be good proactive programming to include a session about how to ask – how to get your spouse to support you. What is kind of – and have – and open it up to the group about things that have worked and not worked for them. But kind of I think most couples don't have the very kind of conscious discussion about what would be the best way for the spouse to support the unemployed person.

And too often the way the spouse is trying to support them is undermining them. So I think having that kind of session would be very useful, and bringing in a therapist – I think you said maybe a family counselor – I think that sounds terrific if they – particularly if they have experience with people dealing with the challenge of unemployment because there are some specifics to that context.

MS. CALIMQUIM: OK. Great. Thank you so much, Ofer, for those responses. We are getting towards the last five minutes of our allotted time. So I'm going to go ahead and move it over to my colleague, Jen, who will talk about sort of our next steps after this subject matter expert webinar. Jen?

MS. SWIDLER: Great. Thank you, Ayreen. Thank you very much, Ofer, for your thoughtful and informative presentation today. It was really great to hear all the ideas that you have. And thanks to all the participants for the great follow-up questions. I look forward to hearing more.

I'd like to invite everyone to join us for the follow-up roundtable discussion next Wednesday, September 30th, at 2:00 p.m. Eastern Time where we can continue this great dialogue that we're having right now. During the roundtable discussion you'll have an opportunity to ask Ofer follow-up questions and also hear from fellow grantees on some of the topics we've covered.

Our guest speakers are going to be from Rochester Works in Rochester, New York and Workforce Alliance from New Haven, Connecticut. There will be time to hear from other grantees as well. So please come prepared with your questions and information shared by your programs. I look forward to a robust discussion next week. Thanks for joining us today, and I hope to hear from you all next week. And I will turn it back to Ayreen for final words.

MS. CALIMQUIM: Great. Thank you so much, Jen. And to just let everyone know this subject matter expert webinar has been recorded, and the transcript will be available next week. In addition to that, we – you did also receive the Outlook invitation for next week's roundtable call, and so we would certainly love for you to feel free to invite any of your service providers to attend that roundtable call as well. And with that, Megan, are you still available?

MS. BAIRD: I am. Thanks, Ayreen. We just wanted to make sure that everyone had the contact information for both Ofer and then a reminder to contact your FPO if necessary as well as the Ready to Work e-mail address. And again, just, Ofer, thank you so much for joining us today for an interesting topic, and again, grantees will be able to speak with you next week in the roundtable.

And to you all, thank you for attending us and for joining us with today's session. We encourage you to join the roundtable, and we're looking forward to continuing this webinar series on long-term unemployed subject matter experts.

MR. KEATING: Very good.

MR. SHARONE: All right. Great. Thank you.

(END)