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Creating and Operating Services to Support Youth in Transitioning to a Post-Secondary Education Goal

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>> JUDITH: All right. It's time for us to begin our afternoon session. I hope everyone had enough chocolate cake to get them through the break, which is an hour and a half. So I don't know if you need more food yet, but try to hang on for now.

We're going to continue our discussion with a focus on post-secondary. And I think in the years that I've been working in the Independent Living field, this is some of the most exciting times in terms of more opportunities for students with disabilities in post-secondary settings.

So we're going to have for our panel for this session -- remember questions are always welcome -- Augusta, Cindy and David. And I'll let them introduce themselves if any more introduction is needed. Thank you so much.

>> AUGUSTA: How is everybody doing?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Good.

>> AUGUSTA: Like David said yesterday, we have to keep you up after lunch. So if I throw something at you, make sure you duck. I'm not joking. I like full attention on me.

One of the things that with post-secondary education, I'm doing a little mini intro about why I'm so passionate about post-secondary education and about education in general. And then I'll turn this over to Cindy to go through how we provide those services through LIFE in Mississippi.

As I told you yesterday, I have two wonderful kids. One of them, my oldest, I'll tell you his age. He's 30, but I'm only 32. While he was in school, we started with the tedious process of trying to figure out exactly what was going on with him. When he was about 8 -- 9 years old and had an IQ test, he tested through the roof, had an amazing IQ, but was failing all his classes. So we couldn't figure out what was going on with that.

As a parent, I could tell you I was that typical uneducated and ignorant parent when it came to working with him and his disability. And I can say that now because a lot of parents don't want to acknowledge that they don't know things. And I had to acknowledge that I didn't know what was going on with my own child.

As he progressed on and we started to figure out that there were some issues that were going on, I was told by an educator that I needed to have a realistic goal, stop pressuring him, that he would never graduate from high school, and that he would never go to college, and I needed to be realistic about this.

I'm not going to tell you exactly what I said to her because that won't be nice, but you can imagine. And from that point on, I became very passionate about making sure all kids got to the post-secondary education that they wanted and they chose to have.

We were very fortunate and very, very blessed that we got the opportunity to look in that teacher's face when he graduated from high school and when he graduated from college. A lot of people don't have that opportunity.

So I just wanted to let you also know that when you're working with kids and you're working with transition, that you are dealing with the whole child, dealing with the whole person. And he is an extremely unique individual, when David was describing the person in his life.

A little story about him. His name is Jojo. So whenever you go to these post-secondary and IEP meetings, picture him, picture Jojo in your head so that you realize that each child is important. Each person is important. You may not understand their dreams. They may not be important to you, but it's their dreams and their transitions.

And we need to make sure we're helping them to follow those dreams. He wanted to be an actor. And I was worried because I thought I was going to have to take care of him the rest of his life, because most actors don't make money.

While he was in high school, I decided to do the medication route. And on his meds, he is a straight A student; not a problem. Off his meds, we working with D minus. At 15, he chose to come off of his meds. That was the hardest thing for me to have to do, but that was his transition. Because I wanted him to stay on his meds so he could be an A student. What he told me was, how can you tell me to stay off drugs but you're popping pills to make me into somebody that I'm not? Me being the parent wanted to have a really smart answer, but I didn't. So I said we'll compromise. He ended up winning.

But the funny thing about that is my daughter who is extremely opposite and extremely anal -- she's a captain in the United States Army -- was an A student and wanted to make A's on everything. Well, she did graduate with honors. Jojo had a D minus, but he graduated. But the funny thing about it is all of his graduation photos have him with the honor's tassel because he talked someone into letting him use their tassel.

So needless to say, there's a thorn of contention in my house every time we look at graduation photos because I have one child who studied her little behind off, and he's saying I graduated with honors too. I have the pictures to prove it.

So just to let you say he is a good actor, and he can talk his way out of anything and into anything, which is how he graduated with honors. He took that -- he was an extremely creative person which transitioned into his post-secondary education. He majored in what in college? Can somebody guess?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Theater.

>> AUGUSTA: Theater. There you go. And I was still worried. Lord, how is he going to pay his bills? We have a problem. But when he went on to college, he soared. He went from being a D minus student to an A student because they took those reins off of him. They let him be creative, and he turned into an A student.

Now I have to tell you that some of his classes was creative dance and tennis, but he still did okay. I was proud of those A's. He went on, and he actually has been in a few commercials. He was in a movie, but now he's realized that he has to pay his bills because I'm not paying them, because I told you yesterday he had to do what? Get out and stay out. So he has a job, and he has taken that creative talent. And I'm telling you, parents, when your kids are saying I'm playing video games, kind of let them. Because guess what he does?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Designs videos.

>> AUGUSTA: He has a dual role with Game Stop. He's a manager of a Game Stop, but he's also one of the people that comes up with the parental controls for the games. So he plays all the games, then decides what kind of parental controls should be on the game. So me, now, me being worried about him, he actually makes more money than I do. But that's good because I can now tell him that transition that started when you were 12 years old helped you to get to where you are.

Just remember when we talk about transition, remember the whole person. Remember that transition is going to start at 11 and 12, whatever we want to start these ages are. But they come out to the end result of the whole person being able to accomplish the goals that they want to accomplish with their life. It's not our choice. It's their choice to be able to put whatever they want in those transition pieces. A lot of times we'll say that's not going to happen. You don't know until you give the person the opportunity.

So with that, I'm going to turn this over to Cindy. And remember whenever you're at an IEP meeting and you think of someone who can't do something and look at the kid and say this is impossible, what name are you going to remember?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Jojo.

>> AUGUSTA: Jojo. He's an actor. He was a D minus student that graduated with honors. Okay?

(Applause)

>> CINDY: All right. So we're going to talk about post-secondary education. What are you going to do after high school? There's really two options, work or school. We're going to focus on what are you school options. Not everybody goes to it, but it should be an option. What do we do at CILs? We give our consumers choices. They choose, but we help them know what they are.

So what does post-secondary education mean in transition? It means that the chance, of course, education after high school, and the education can be a big word. That doesn't have to be formal. It can be training, anything, learning. Everybody needs to learn. It means that young adults can grow and learn more about themselves.

I never went and lived in a dorm, but I know those who did. I've heard lots of stories. So that could be a wonderful transition for a consumer, a youth, to sort of branch out and learn about independence in a safer environment while they're learning things. So that's an option.

Socialization, college is totally different than high school. In high school you have a bell to tell you when to go, when to leave, when to do this and that. In college you just chill. I mean you have to get to class on time, but that's your responsibility. You're not having teachers yelling at you down the hallway.

Socialization is a great thing. It's amazing how sometimes the population, the people without disabilities, all of a sudden it's like the wall goes away on a lot of them. They grow up. To me, it's just amazing to me. It's like now they're no longer around their peers so much. They're not in all the clicks. They're the individual selves. So if you have them as an individual self, they're not as scared to talk to the girl in the wheelchair or the person that has a hearing impairment. They're not scared about that. So it's interesting.

Independence can be gained. This is very true. You don't have the assistance in college like you do in high school. You do get accommodations, and we're going to go over that, but you don't have them plopped on you. You don't have Mary following you around. If you have a helper, you can have things like that, but you have to ask for it.

You have to tell each professor what you need. So if you don't want help in English, you're not going to get help in English. But if you start to fail, you're not going to have someone coming up to you and say, honey, are you sure you don't need help?

That's a very big growing period for a youth. Because they're not with mama, and mama can't tell that school to do it because they're not going to listen to mama, daddy, grandma, nobody. It has to be the student. But you learn how to say I need a little bit of help here.

Of course, there's more opportunities in the future. As you learn more, your options are bigger. The world, with the economy the way it is, you definitely need to know as much as possible.

So how does HOT do it? Oh, we do it well. Each IL specialist or transition specialist serving youth develops relationships with youth and their families, the whole person. We need to know these families. What always baffles me, and I have to remind my assistants because I'll put down Mary Wallace called. Okay, but who's her child? I need to know the whole thing. If I don't know them, I don't know them. So I'm learning relationships.

Then there's this one I talk to every day. After I've gotten to know them, I know them, but you develop relationships. You learn where the mom may be a little protective, and the girl can't get out of the house. You learn about that, and you need to because you need to know what their strengths and weaknesses are. And when you give them the choices, how to display it for them. You don't want to give them everything and then say now you have a choice, because that's a lot of options, hopefully.

The core team. We're going to talk about that in a second because it takes a village to raise a child. It takes a team to get you going. We need collaborations. I rely on that very greatly. So the core team needs to collaborate. When the student is in high school, and, of course, we already talked to the student, hopefully, earlier on. But when our student is in high school and we're really getting closer, we really get our core team together.

And that core team can consist of a lot of people, of course, first and foremost the young adult. No matter what the disability is, no matter what the communication, because if they can't public communicate, that obviously needing to be a goal of communication devised or some way of communicating. Because everybody has a say -- yes, no, something to that effect.

Parent/guardian, if -- and I'm saying this -- if the young adult wants it. Oh, did I say that? I did. If the parent or guardian is going to be a part of that child's life, as an adult, like they're going to be providing supports, if they're going to be paying for college, it's a good idea to have them there, but it's the young adult's choice. Once they turn 18, that's my consumer as an adult.

The parent choice, I should be there, obviously, because I'm going to be working with you. So the CILs specialist needs to be there. VR counselor, I know that each state has different age times that kick in, but you need to learn what that age is and get a defined answer from the head part of the vocational rehabilitation. Because if you ask one, you have to make it another answer because some of them it's changed I know. So you want to get that answer, and you want to get them involved as soon as possible because it takes time to get this going.

And then if your school has a transition counselor, get them in there because they know all the school stuff going on and the teachers. They know all that stuff. And if you know you want to go to a certain college or that student wants to go to a certain college, each college usually has a disabilities support, somebody that is the disability contact; ODA, which is Office of Disability Accommodation, things of that nature. There's somebody there that's going to get you your accommodations. And lots of them, especially junior colleges, are willing to meet and willing to be a part of that.

So what does it take? We've got a core team. We've got them together. We've identified who we need to have there. Now we're going to have what I call a PCP meeting, Person Centered Planning meeting. I love these things because it helps the youth see what their options are, see what they have, see where they've been, and see what we have to do to get them there.

Because a lots of them say I want to do this, but they don't quite understand the steps it's going to take to get to that. And we want to make sure that they understand I'm not going it all. Your mom's not doing it all. If you want to go to college, this is what you need to do. If you want to go to a tech school, this is what you need to do.

So you can facilitate yourself as a specialist or you can collaborate with another agency to allow you to be more participating in the activity, which I like to do that. There are different agencies that do PCP meetings. So I usually have a few that I work with. So, again, collaboration. And they can also sometimes get an outside view if they have not looked with that student.

Meet with the youth and family before the PCP meeting. I like to do that to let them know what's going to happen, what to expect, what they need to be thinking about. Because it can be overwhelming if they haven't had a meeting like this before. So you've got this meeting, and they're taking about what you want to do. They're talking about you, the youth. And they're like whoa, this is little bit too much. So talk to your youth and the family, if they want the family involved. Talk to them and let them know what's going to be done.

Again, make sure you plan early enough on the meeting also because you have a lot of people, that can core team, that doesn't have to be just them. It could be anybody else that's involved in that student's life. So if there's a friend that's going to be the PCA or whatever, have them there, if there is a sister or anybody.

But you need to make sure you can plan early enough because if you don't have certain pieces, likes the VR counselors scheduled or the disability support person's schedule is full, it kind of takes away from the meeting. Like I said, it helps them get their wants pinpointed and help them realistically fulfill them.

So what does it take? It takes planning, planning, planning. I'm big on planning. So I love to get my students as early as possible. But, unfortunately, some schools like to wait until it's not time to transition them. So you just start as early as you can on planning.

Beginning at school IEP. Like I mentioned earlier, your transition page. It's a beautiful, beautiful page. I know that it got moved, the age got moved up to 16 federally for you to have to start working on that. But as a child/parent, you can start discussing that with your school. Well, I want to fill that out. I do want to do that because that's the student's IEP. It is that student's IEP. And our state is still 14. It's state mandated at 14. So thankfully we've got something there. So I think as early as possible.

And what that page is, is talking about that transition of that student. Because that IEP is supposed to help with the curriculum and everything like that, but it's also supposed to help with helping a student into Independent Living. And that point gets kind of shadowed a little bit.

But learning after high school is that. The IEP -- I don't know if I put on the next page or not. Okay. That IEP, another big thing is what degree setting do you have on that IEP? Do you have high school diploma? And if your state has it, do you have occupational diploma or do you have certificate?

And depending on what age we're looking at here, if you're like in elementary school and you see a certificate, I would explain to that consumer, that parent, that we can put that on a diploma track, shoot for that and always change it back to certificate if we don't make it. Diploma, that is so important. It will open so many doors.

They say, well, you can get a GED. A GED is very difficult to get, and also that's going to be time consuming too. You put this label on this child or this young adult of having a certificate. Now they have to learn everything that they didn't learn in high school because they were sitting in the segregated class.

>> JUDITH: Cindy, we have a question over here.

>> CINDY: Oh, I'm sorry. I just start talking.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: I just have a question about the transition piece of the IEP. Is there a way to access a blank copy of that?

>> CINDY: Yes, there is a way. It should be on the Department of Education's Web site. Just look up IEP, and you should be able to get a blank copy.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Okay. Thank you.

>> CINDY: Uh-huh. Any questions? Okay. So the degree option is so important. I can't express that enough. Now if you get them in high school, it's probably going to be too late. And that breaks my heart because -- you're like, oh, I'm too late. Don't fret. Because if that student that has the abilities to start learning or to learn, you can have in that IEP that they start focusing on GED and stuff. So while they're going to get a certificate, they can be getting taught to be prepared for the GED. So that is a very important thing.

And, of course, I'm not saying that every student is going to be able to do this. But a lot of them don't realize the accommodations they can be getting with IEPs. You don't have to change the curriculum. You just have to make it accessible.

>> AUGUSTA: I'm going to jump in here and echo what Cindy is saying about when you get your young adults at their seventh grade, eighth grade, ninth grade and they're starting to transition from junior high into high school, we know that's probably one of the most important transitions. We know that when you're transitioning from elementary to junior high, it's a big change physically and all these things that are going on.

But educationally that's one of your biggest transitions. Because what a lot of people don't realize, a lot of parents don't realize, and I didn't realize this, is that when your child has his IEP in the eighth grade, they're already writing up that educational piece for that ninth grade teacher.

A lot of those ninth grade teachers, they don't know your child. They've never met them. They've never laid eyes on them. They're looking at that transition page or that IEP piece that's been sent over from that junior high or in some states that middle school.

So it's very important that you get involved, be extremely involved. And make sure you stress with your parents if they're extremely involved with that IEP in that eighth grade or junior high IEP meeting. Because you want it to be and you want it to say diploma track.

Because if you get -- if you go to your IEP for your ninth grade year and you might be half way and even if you're three or four months into your ninth grade year and you're on a certificate track or occupational track, then that student is going to have to go back and try to catch up on all of those core classes that they've missed.

And a lot of times, even in the ninth grade, it becomes overwhelming for a student to have to go back and try to catch up on all of those credits or those carnegie units they might have not had to be able to get a diploma. And that's very, very disheartening.

So make sure that your parents know that eighth grade that they need to make sure that their parents are paying attention. Because I'm going to tell you what happened to me. Luckily enough I actually saw it on the IEP. Here I am thinking that I knew what I was doing, and they had certificate track checked off on my son's IEP.

When I asked the teacher, I said what does this mean, certificate track? You now what she said? She said don't worry. It will be easier for him. It's going to look just like a diploma.

So that's why I needed to make sure you tell parents exactly what they're looking for. Read through it. That's why advocates are so important. Because just luckily enough I asked a question because I did not have an advocate with me and did not even know what I was looking for. Just blessedly enough I asked a question.

And when she said it was going to look like a diploma, of course the flags went up everywhere. What do you mean, look like a diploma? So it's a lot of schools. They think they're helping your child by making it easier for them so they won't stress them out about having to take all these classes.

But like Cindy said, even if they take those classes in their ninth grade year and they fail, they can go back to certificate. But it's real hard to go from certificate and occupational diploma to a regular diploma. That's real hard.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: My question is I have a lot of high school -- I have two questions, actually. I have a lot of high schoolers that just now started getting into high schools where the teachers aren't telling them they have a certificate. And they are literally sitting down with the teacher planning to go to a four-year school, and they weren't even notified that they couldn't go to a four-year school because their diploma didn't -- our diplomas are the same as long as you get your work hours, but your transcript is different, and that's what you have to have to go to college. They weren't even aware of that until I came in and said, oh, no, you can't do that.

My other problem is whenever I have worked with a teacher on trying to say, no, they can do this, let's at least let them try, they always throw back at me, well, their testing scores are too low. And so, therefore, they don't even qualify for the diploma track. I mean, I can't really fight what a test says. So how do you get your way around that?

>> AUGUSTA: I don't know how it works in your state. But in Mississippi, they rely a lot on those testing scores. But if you as a parent or as an advocate say you want your child on a diploma track, they have to put them in a fully inclusive classroom.

I tell parents that are going into their IEP meetings, if you don't know any other phrase to say, least restricted environment, least restricted environment so they can be placed in a regular classroom so that they can at least be getting those units. And, again, I say if they fail, at least they've been in the class.

(Dog barking)

>> AUGUSTA: What's wrong? I'm sorry. He's asleep, and he's dreaming. He's chasing rabbits in his sleep.

>> CINDY: I'm sorry.

>> AUGUSTA: I think it's kind of cute.

So make sure that even when you get -- and I can't stress this enough, eighth grade. Parents need to know. So we are trying -- that's why Christy was saying yesterday it's so important we need back this transition age up to 13 or 14, because if you think about transition age of being 16, when you're 16 years old, most of your other classmates are planning for what college you're going to.

If go to a student who's 16, you're 16 or 17 years old and now you have to go back and take eighth and ninth grade classes, what are they going to say? Just forget it. And that's why so many of our kids get lost in the system. And it breaks my heart because we're having kids now, young adults -- I use the word kids because they're kids to me. I mean no disrespect. They're just young.

We're seeing them, and they're now 20, 21, coming out of school thinking they're going to be able to at least go to a junior college and they have a certificate. So now they're having to go back and try to take the GED. And I don't know about you guys, but the GED is hard to get. A lot of people are telling these kids, well, you can just take your GED. That is hard. It's hard to pass the GED.

>> RICHARD: Just one answer to the testing question, and this is not by any means a full answer. But one thing is -- and you may certainly already be there -- but making sure that in that testing process that they are taking full advantage of the accommodations that should be provided to them in the testing process. Because sometimes when those test scores are low, it's because people are not getting good accommodations in the testing process itself.

>> AUGUSTA: I'm sorry. There's one more question back here.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes. Say, for instance, in our state we have a TPYA class, and it's Transition Program for Young Adults, and it's for the 18 to 21, 22 year olds. Now say they were on the certificate track and they didn't know that, and say they want to go to a junior college, is there a way to help them at that point in their life, those two or three years they can get on a track so they could go to a junior college and kind of backtrack in a way, I guess?

>> AUGUSTA: What I would suggest to you is -- because each state's Department of Ed is different. I can tell you what to do in Mississippi, but that won't necessarily help you. What I would do is go to your Department of Ed Web site, and they have the listing of all the different programs that -- I know in Mississippi they have a listing of each one of the programs and how they can assist students to be able to go back and sometimes catch those units up.

Because a lot of times what they won't tell you is if you have a young adult -- we'll use the word behind. If they're trying to catch up, they might be able to take some of those classes at the junior college or the junior college that might be close to the high school and be able to catch those credits up. So they're going to school in the day and then taking classes at night. That's what one of my kids did. But you have to make sure you check in your state's Department of Ed and see if that's a program you have in your state.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah. But I was also thinking along the lines that while they're in that TPYA program, I guess I need to check the Web site to see if that's an option for them during that time period that they're there.

>> AUGUSTA: I don't know if you can have a dual program, which I think you're asking me.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Oh, would that be a dual program?

>> CINDY: Well, it couldn't be a college, but they can help get money in preparation, and it could be in the IEP to get ready.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yes, that's what I'm saying, catching up on the high school that they would have needed to get the diploma.

>> CINDY: Right. They would need to make the goals of being prepped to be able to go to junior college. Because now they could be something lower than that.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Changing their goals.

>> CINDY: Like changing what their goals are. The youth is going to need to be able to say I want this. So when they give you the IEP that's already printed on, you X through the goals and you write down what you want.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: All right. Thank you.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have another question that may be too long, and you can just tell me. I'll talk to you later, that's fine.

Getting to the high schools, I had to go through the teachers that I knew. And then I've made the same connections that Dave was talking about earlier, just kind of building out and doing that process.

But when I go to those schools, I'm not in IEP meetings unless I meet a student or a parent that says I would like you to work with us, and then they become my consumer and so on. In middle school if I'm trying to catch everybody and get those seventh and eighth graders, how do you find that process to get those middle school students in that bulk of people?

>> AUGUSTA: I do understand what you're saying. That's where you've got to go back to utilizing the people in your center to be able to go into schools and do presentations. We have found that we get a lot of consumers at health fairs. We go in and we just do a presentation at a junior high, and we just kind of throw it out there. Make sure that you're on the diploma track. And kids start to ask those questions.

When you go into PTA meetings or anywhere where you know that you might have a person that has a child with a disability, just ask the question. We have come up with a lot of consumers. I've talked to a lot of people just by asking a question. What track is your child on? And they have no idea what I'm talking about. So then when you start to explain what you mean by diploma track or a certificate track, then they start to ask the questions.

And it's hard. You know you can't get to everybody, but at least the ones that you come in contact with. I'm bad at the grocery store. What track is your child on? What track is your child on? That's going to be my mantra. So you have to make sure that you at least getting to people that you know. We wish we could help everyone.

My best friend is a special ed teacher, and we have battled conversations about this because that's who she is. She wants to make it easy for the kids. She wants to make sure that they're not stressed out. She'll say, well, it's okay for them to be on a certificate program, and I'll say no it's not.

So you have make sure you're at least getting to the kids that you can get to and so that they can transition early enough. So even if it's an elementary school, even if you're going to an elementary school and you're doing speaking engagements, start putting in your parents' minds and young adults heads if you want to go the college.

And we need to stop saying if you want to go to college and start asking our kids what college do you want to go. Stop asking them if and say, where do you want to go to college? Where do you want to go? So it's in their head when they get in junior high and in high school that they need to start preparing for it.

>> CINDY: I've gotten into a lot of schools by connecting with the transition counselors of those schools because they have a hard job. You don't start telling them, hey, I can go to IEP meetings and start advocating, because they're going to be like okay. You just say I can help these children transition. I can help with the resources. I don't mind.

I have days where I spend at half the county just meeting family after family after family because that's my transition counselors are hooking me up. Then once as I'm meeting with them I'm able to say so what diploma track is your child on? Oh, okay. Well, one thing I can do is go to IEP meetings and help you. And they're like, oh, yeah. So you can make connections with the schools. Once you get a transition counselor, they'll get you down the line.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: This is Joseph Nolan. I'm a Texas transition counselor with DARS division for blind services. Truthfully, I never heard of a certificate program in Texas. We have minimum plan/recommended plan. This is news to me, if you're graduating on minimum plan, you can still go to college, you just couldn't go to a four-year university.

So in Texas it's important to distinguish between minimum, which means you can go to college. You'll just be going to a junior college. You can still go. But if you're not on the recommended plan, you do not have the necessary requirements for the curriculum for a four-year university.

>> CINDY: Can they get an associates or are they only getting a vo-tech?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: They can certainly, in a junior college, they would get an associates and then transfer on after their first or second year to a regular university.

>> CINDY: We used to have that more in Mississippi. I know on the Gulf Coast, a lot of the junior colleges are cutting that out. They have a test where you have to test to be able to get into that. I know it's different in each state. But we're just trying to make sure that our student have the best options, you know, the most.

>> AUGUSTA: It's really important that you guys go back and check your Department of Ed Web site. I would suggest there's a lot of states here. There's like 25 states representing here. So every state's Department of Ed is going to be different. You have a lot of states that have different terminologies for different types of diplomas. So before you start trying to go and go to IEP meetings and help people transition, make sure you know what's offered in your state, and make sure you're offering what's best for that particular student.

Now we're not sitting here saying that every student is going to get a diploma. We realize that. We know that's not going to happen. But if it's an option, make sure that your kids are transitioning to the best of their ability and that they're reaching for what they can reach for and not just settle for what the Department of Ed wants to give them.

>> CINDY: I know it varies by state, but we're just trying to give you the information to let you know what the most options are.

So the options of the school. Let's break it down. Four-year college. So that's usually the typical child that wants to -- do we have a hand up?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Inaudible) age range you mentioned starting at eighth grade. But if your CIL is starting a new youth program, and you're tending to target the older students, how can you handle going all the way back to eighth grade and then having the young adults going all the way up to 20, 25, 30 years old?

>> AUGUSTA: I'm sorry.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: What I'm saying if you're CIL and starting a youth program, I see the importance of going back to eighth grade. But if you're serving students that have transitioned out of high school, maybe the age 17 to 30, or 25 -- 30, that age range, it just seems like a lot to add in the students that are going all the way back to eighth grade. So how do you guys -- what do you recommend a CIL that has a smaller youth program or starting a youth program, how do you handle all of that?

>> AUGUSTA: We are really fortunate that our healthy opportunity specialists do work between the ages of 0 and 21. So they have the opportunity of having younger consumers. I know it's going to be difficult if you're just starting a youth program or if you don't have a youth transition program at all in your CIL.

But just keep in mind that you do need to make sure that you're trying to work with younger adults. If someone is between 17 and 21 and already exiting out of high school, that's when you help them with those adult services, to be able to get them maybe a GED so that they can't go on to further their education.

But if you're trying to back it up, that's going to be your individual CIL, and I would suggest that you have a sit down with your wonderful executive director -- I'm looking at me ED to see how she would handle it -- to how you would sit down with your wonderful executive director to ask how you would be able to -- you're not going to be able to take on everything at once, especially when you're starting a youth program. But just remember when your transitioning people, that that eighth grade to high school is the important year to be able to make sure they get those units.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: So are you suggesting at this point that that would be like the most important place to start the eighth grade versus starting to the later years?

>> AUGUSTA: In my wonderful opinion that only matters now is that, yes, to me if you're talking about education, if you're talking about making sure a person is going to transition from into the eighth grade into high school and making sure they can get a regular diploma, that eighth grade to ninth grade year is very important because that's when the IEP and all those transitional service are on there to make sure the young adult is going to be able to get a regular diploma.

Because once they get into the tenth or eleventh year, it's not impossible to go back and catch those unit stuff. If you think about it, if a ninth grader is taking an average of seven classes their ninth grad year and they're not on a diploma track, by the time they're in the tenth grade, that's another seven or eight classes that they've missed out on. But the time they get to their junior year, they're having to go back and catch up 14 or 15 classes.

That's why we're saying that it's important that they take the right classes their ninth grad year so that they're not behind. They're not trying to catch up. So they won't be behind the other students. That's why it's important, I feel, that it's important.

Because I realize how difficult it is. You're transitioning. You're a freshman in high school. You're already worried about what clothes your wearing. You're transitioning into that high school anyway. So then you don't want to go in and be behind in your tenth or eleventh year.

Because it's really disheartening when you see your peers that you've had from elementary school moving on. They're moving on. They're now freshman. They're now sophomores. They're now juniors, and you're still classified as a freshman. That's really disheartening to kids.

>> CHRISTY: Let me just add, I think if you're center is looking at serving youth and they're looking at the age range of 17 to 21, honestly, by the time they're 17, as Augusta has said, the die has been cast so to speak as to where they're going beyond that. If they're on a certificate track at 17, trying to get those credits on a diploma track is going to be really, really difficult to do.

So your center might as well at this point, don't give up on these kids from 17 to 21, but you might as well start thinking about the adult services that you're going to provide them. My suggestion would be, and I don't know how you all have done this. But I think you might need to consider creating an advisory council specifically on that issue so that you've got some young people and you've got some kids. You've got some teenagers, some young adults that will help the center to decide where the services need to be, and if you need to back it up to the age of 14 or even 12 or whatever.

Nothing about us without us, right? So I would recommend -- and that's how we made our determination. We had that youth advisory council. We had our board of directors, obviously, and we started talking to young people. And that's how we decided the age range we would serve. It helped we were being given money to serve a certain age range as well.

>> AUGUSTA: I think we had one hand up here first, I think. Ma'am?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: At this point, I'd just like to interject a resource that addresses so many of the things we've talked about over the last day and a half. There's a national initiative called the Youth Leadership Forums. And the last I knew, there were 23 states that had active youth leadership forums.

And during those forums, we spent a lot of time -- I know the executive director of the North Carolina YLF is here, and there might be others. But we address a lot of these issues, when we -- each state develops their own age range by which they're going to serve in their forum. But we begin to talk to the youth. We have youth come to our forum that don't know why they're on an IEP. And accommodation is a hotel room. And the ADA is their American Dental Association.

So when we start to work with youth in regard to what their accommodation may be at the age of impression, then we empower them with the skills to go into that IEP meeting and ask what track they're on to be able to state their dream. Because when they leave the forum, they have a leadership plan. They have a resource plan and a commitment to be part of the community.

So those youth leadership fours are an avenue by which you can access a pool of youth. Hundreds of youth go through youth leadership forums every summer across this country. And then they turn around and serve as mentors to be able to learn how to ask those questions.

With mentorship, it's a huge part of Independent Living, and I've been involved for about 29 years. This pool of mentors that we have young people to young people is huge. I think that the YLS can be a huge part of this whole issue.

>> AUGUSTA: I've been to one of those youth forums, and they are amazing. She's correct. If you want to learn about teaching leadership or transitioning young adults into leadership, it's really an amazing network. It's an amazing forum.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Since this is really about people starting up a youth leadership transition program, I'm curious, on average, one person, how many consumers do they have on average if they're 35 hours?

>> AUGUSTA: See, you're starting trouble. Trying to make us say that our HOT specialists are overworked, and they are. Like we said, we cover the state. On average, one specialist -- Cindy, how many cases do you have?

>> CINDY: About 125.

>> AUGUSTA: She has a 125 cases.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm working with eleventh and twelfth graders, and I have eleven of them. That's a lots of work. I find it for somebody starting off that's a lot of work for them.

>> AUGUSTA: Cindy said can she trade with you.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, I'm also an employment specialist full time. This is really a part-time job for me. But I think it's important for us to talk about. To start off, there's so much information. I'm in the eleventh and twelfth grade, and this is something I've never heard of with this, and I'm not sure how Connecticut does it. But just to have that discussion real quick of how much of CIL should be really expecting one person who's full-time, how many consumers should they expect? Because I think if we overwhelm ourselves, it won't be successful.

>> AUGUSTA: You're going to get me in trouble. We really do understand about specialists being overworked and paid so well.

(Laughter)

>> AUGUSTA: What we try to -- and working closely with the HOT specialist, I try to get them to understand that, yes, there are going to be some situations. Like Cindy said, she has 125 consumers. Des probably has more than that because he's centrally located, and he's in the center of the state.

But what we have to realize is each consumer, there might be one that's going to need a lot of your time. Then there might be one that the only thing they need is a phone number. So I'm not saying that one is more important than the other, but they really have to learn how to prioritize their time. Who's going to do what? Who needs what? They have to make sure that if they need some help they ask for help.

We have Americorps members in our office that they can turn to that a lot of times with the follow-up phone calls. They can have other people try to help them with their follow-up. And then when it comes down to the fact that, okay, now we're setting an IEP meeting. Now that specialist needs to be involved. They know the consumer. They know who they're talking to. They know who their person is calling about, but they do have help. When she says 125, she's not calling 125 people every day.

>> JUDITH: Oh, I thought she was.

>> CINDY: I have a lot of calls to make up this week.

>> JUDITH: This is a great discussion. I think we know that as -- that time and effort vary depending on the individual you're working with. And everyone works pretty much, I'm sorry to say, in overload in terms of what we're trying to do. But I also think the point is well taken as people are starting into it, don't just throw them in the deep end and see if they can swim. They're going to need support to.

I was wondering, these have been great discussions, but we have quite a bit more to cover and still have to hear from David. So maybe if you can move into some of the accommodation issues because those are huge changes in post-secondary.

>> CINDY: Okay. I do want to mention the access program. It's on the other page. If you all look at Mississippi state, there's an access program that's a new pilot program. It is for those who did get the certificate, did not get a diploma. They are trying to help them get living skills and skills to become different things other than just working at Wal-Mart. So it's a great program. It just started out, and you all may want to look at it. If you all have contacts in different states, that might be something you want to look at.

I just talked about accommodation changes. Youth do not have an IEP in college, so what do you do then? You are now covered under 504 ADA. So what that means is the youth is in charge. The youth has to dictate what they need. In the IEP meetings, they need to be there. Because if they're not there running the meeting, what are they going to do now?

So that's why I have a lot of youth that come out but don't not what to do because mom always did IEP meeting. I don't know what she said. I don't know what I had. So they don't know the accommodations they got. They didn't know how to ask what they needed. Have your consumer get the last IEP because they can look at that and help when they're discussing with the disability contact at the college.

Again, the youth has to be active. Some community colleges will take the IEP and accept that. Now most of them, they have a form you have to fill out. You have to have a doctor fill it out saying they do have a disability and they do need accommodations. What does that mean? Do it early. Don't wait until registration college time because that student is going to start college without any accommodations. That college has other students with disabilities.

Don't underestimate need. One of my biggest things is we want to be able to do everything. Again, we talked about trying to hide our disabilities. We think we can do it all. We don't want to say we need help. Talk to your youth about saying that they need help. They can always turn away help after they've learned they don't need it. But you don't want that student to start failing college which costs money and then go, well, maybe I should have. Talk to them realistically about what their needs are.

And now she gets the money.

>> AUGUSTA: Everybody always wants to talk about going to college, and we want to give our young adults the opportunity to go to college. Like Cindy said, when you get out of high school, we've all heard free and appropriate education. But once you get to college, there's no longer free and appropriate education. You have to pay for it. We need to make sure that we're letting our young adults realize, yes, we do want you to go to college. Yes, we do want you to be able to experience that, but, yes, it's going to cost money.

So we need to make sure that we're preparing our parents, preparing our students. I have a lot of parents, their kids get to the twelfth grade, and then they say, okay, they're going to go to college. Now what do I do? Well, do you have a college fund? And they look at you with this blank stare.

We need to make sure that we're letting our parents know that if you want your child to go to college, just because your child has a disability, they're not going to get a free ride. We have to push to let parents know and let young adults know with disabilities, you're going to have to pay for some stuff. We get to the point we a lot of times we think about we're going to be able to have people pay for things. That's not going to happen in college.

With the FAFSA forms, if you will look at this, we're going to make sure -- we're going through this so we won't take David's time. Make sure that people have filled out their FAFSA forms. Make sure that you throw in that they have to have done their taxes. A lot of people don't realize you can't get FAFSA if you haven't filed your tax forms. You are responsible. That person is on that family's income or the parent's income until they're 24.

A lot of times kids will think I'm coming out of school, we kind of say, you're an adult, you're an adult, you're an adult. They hear that, but when you fill out those FAFSA forms, they're going to look at that family income until they're 24, and they're going to ask for your parents' tax returns. It does not matter if you live with them or not. They want your parents' tax returns.

So make sure that the student understands that if they want to get that federal aid, we're talking about federal aid, federal FAFSA, their parents income is going to count until they're 24, and they're going to want those FAFSA forms in their application. They need to fill out that application, I think it says on the next slide, the second semester, but you need to make sure the second semester of your senior year, the beginning of that second semester, you're filling out those FAFSA forms and getting them in.

Yes, ma'am?

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: I just wanted to mention something that people forget a lot of the time. Once they turn 18, to see if they can get on SSI or SSDI because, there's so many work incentives as well as school education, that only if you're on those two programs you can get. So it will help pay for books and accommodations and so forth. So I always stress, I know the importance of going to school. But to get them on those benefits so they get those incentives.

>> AUGUSTA: You can come up here and present with us. That's our next one.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, I'm sorry. I didn't look ahead.

>> AUGUSTA: No. You're good. You're good. We just want to make sure, too, your VR, that is an opportunity to make sure that your young adult is on those lists, that the CIL representative, the specialist, they're making sure that they're part of that. Because they will pay for some college. They will pay for books. But you have to make sure you're working with your transition specialist, that they know it's one of your goals to go to college.

Don't wait until the day before you getting ready to go college and say I need tuition assistance. Make sure if you have your transition specialist or your VR specialist that's working with you, your vocational rehab specialist, that they know that's one of your goals. Cindy and Des can tell you, that's going to be on a goal. So they've already referred them over to VR so that state employee knows that person wants to go to college.

>> CINDY: You already met them in high school.

>> AUGUSTA: You should have already met them. That should be part of your transition team, like Cindy was talking about. They should have been at those transition or those PCP meetings. So they already know what's going on. They already know you want to go to college. So that should already be in play when you're getting ready to start school, that you have books, you have tuition, all that stuff and the assistance that you have already applied for and are going to receive.

Yes, ma'am.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: And I just wanted to provide a resource that I have used that maybe will help some of you that you don't know that's out there. It's called -- I don't know the actual Web site. But if you go online and Google, it's the 4-1-1 disability disclosure for youth. And it goes through everything about disability, disclosure, asking for accommodations. It teaches them how to do that.

I'm bringing that to the classroom to these students. It not only has a discussion point, but it actually gives them scenarios, and they have to interact and learn. And there's also a parent one that goes along with it to teach them different things. I just wanted to provide that resource for you guys. I don't want to use too much time because it's been very useful, and I've used it in two different school areas.

>> AUGUSTA: Thank you so much. The interpreter just told me I was killing him. I'm so sorry. I talk fast with a southern drawl. So I know I'm killing him. Just throw something at me.

So we talked about VR. And, guys, make sure if somebody is mentioning a resource and it sounds interesting, go to that person so you can get that resource so that we can make sure that we're helping our students.

Please make sure that once they fill out that FAFSA form, that they also go to their VR representative. Like Cindy said, they're already at those meetings, so they can get all the benefits, all the moneys they're going to need to go to school. Because we realize with the income levels, college is expensive, and we need to make sure that we have all the resources that we can have.

Work study. We also are realizing that work study is a big part of going to college. We all participate -- well, let me take that back. I've participated in work study. This is one of the situations where as a CIL and as a transition specialist that you have already, hopefully, been working with your young adult about having a job, about being employed. Because if they don't know this, when they get to school and you start talking about work study, which is basically a job, they're going to have to know how to be able to present themselves to go get that work study program started.

So we want to make sure that with our peer support, with our skills training, that they also know how to go and apply for those work study programs so that a person can utilize the whole. And, again, when you're transitioning into college, how many of us have gone to work study and some of the people that we're work studying with end up being our best friends? That's how we build our peer relations to transitioning into another part of life.

So make sure that you have all these things on your transition piece, that it's listed on those goals, that everything that we're talking about is listed so that your VR counselor, your specialist, your transition specialist, everybody is working toward that goal. And work study is an amazing opportunity for people to be able to earn some money while they're in school to help pay off some of those bills. I had bills.

Scholarships. Make sure your young adult knows where to go and seek out scholarship opportunity. We need to make sure that we're telling them that they go to the counselor's office, that we educate our youth about scholarships being turned in, the paperwork being turned in on time.

There are amazing opportunities, and I'm sure everyone knows of scholarship opportunities in their local neighborhoods. You can get a scholarship from almost anyone. A lot of people have scholarships that people just don't realize. If you go to your counselor's office, those scholarships are listed in those counselor's offices. So make sure that you're utilizing all the opportunity for funding.

I think she wants David now.

>> JUDITH: Well, I think we want to give David some time. The questions have been great. If you want to take just one minute or two minutes to wrap up, Augusta. There's also some great resources on the other slide. So I hope you'll go over them. You and David can negotiate, okay?

>> AUGUSTA: Just make sure that when you're talking about funding with your young adults that you're utilizing all of the things that you know about. Make sure you tell them to go to their counselor, go to their counselor's office and look on the boards. I know a lot of the high schools they have those small scholarships. Apply for everything. It's better to apply for it and not get it than say I should have applied for it. If you get a thousand scholarships at $50 each, that's money in your pocket.

We also encourage people to apply for Americorps. We have been talking about the Americorps program. Apply for Americorps. A lot of times if a young adult decides that they want to go and get some work experience or get some job related experience before they go to college, some Americorps programs are part-time where the person can go to college and participate in Americorps.

One of the great benefits of the Americorps program is once they finish 1700 hours for the Americorps program, that student then gets an educational award of $5,000 that goes toward that college tuition. It doesn't go to the student. It goes to the college. So that's a wonderful opportunity. If you complete two years of Americorps, that's $10,000 towards your education. That's a great start for somebody that might not have the financial means to be able to go to school. And I know parents would love to be able to say that my young adult has now $10,000 to start school with. Okay.

We're going to let David go. Do we have any questions? We had some wonderful questions, and we kind of got off on other things. But do you guys have any other questions? And everybody that has resources, make sure if anybody asks you, you have those ready to give out.

>> DAVID: It's okay because I can talk really fast to catch up on my -- kidding. I'm kidding. I would never do that.

I'm going to skip through a couple of my slides because I don't want to be totally repetitive. And some of the questions have already been asked and answered. I do want to cover just a few things for MCIL here and how we approach the post-secondary.

Again, as Augusta just said, as we move through this next half hour, 20 minutes or so, if you have questions, please feel free to ask them, and I'll do my best to answer.

Again, just a bit of a review from the previous slides that I've shown you. We have two transition staff members, two CIL core staff members that dedicate time and efforts to transition services.

Our youth transition funding is used primarily used for core service dollars and we do some occasional contracts or grantsmanship. And the contracts would be contracts with individual school districts or we've had some in the past with the Minnesota Department of Education.

We actually had a grant from the Minnesota Department of Education a few years ago. It was a three-year grant. We used some of those funds to actually do a statewide survey of students, transitioned aged students, to basically ask them those four questions -- I like, I don't like, I want, I don't want.

And what we found overwhelmingly in the various -- we went to 15 different school districts -- urban, suburban, and rural school districts -- to ask the students these questions. What was their transition experience like? What kind of services were they receiving? What was their level of satisfaction? And I'll be happy to send the results of that survey to Darrell, and she can put them on the Wiki site so you can see them at a later time. I didn't think about it when we were putting this presentation together. So I'll send it along as a follow up.

The important thing is what we found from the students, what they were staying us as they were preparing for post-secondary transition, was they wanted the school system to listen to them. And that was the one thing that they found to be most lacking was that they simply were not listened to. When they would express those I like, I don't like, I want, I don't want, they weren't listened to. They want the school district in that process to listen to them.

Again, in our team approach at MCIL, as many of you do, it's very cross disciplinary, very cross disability focused, etc. So all the services at the center are cross disability -- cross disciplinary, excuse me.

And as preparing young people for transitioning into post-secondary settings, we tend to consistently involve not only the transition staff but the core IL staff as well as the IL/VR collaboration. And I'm not going to talk a lot about that collaboration right now because that's the next piece after the break. So I'll get into more detail about that then.

Those staff regularly conduct cross referrals to ensure that the students' needs and wants are being addressed appropriately. So that as we're moving through that process with them, that those various pieces, whether it might be pre-employment, whether it might be post-secondary educational settings, whether it might be vocational, whatever it might be that we're making sure that we're taking a cross disciplinary very rounded approach to responding to the needs of the students that are putting in front of us.

This also includes a regular and consistent use of the Disability Linkage Line, which I talked about before, to ensure that the proper identification of available and appropriate resources is managed as well. So that's a little bit of reiteration.

Again, this slide is a bit of reiteration as well. We embed in the specific school sites, and you've heard me talk about that. So I'm going to jump ahead.

One of the things that we do at MCIL, as you see here, that I think really lends itself to post-secondary transition process for students with disabilities is that one of the things that we seek to do on a regular basis is maintain the connection to most of the colleges and universities in our area. And the staff at MCIL are very comfortable initiating new contacts as needed.

So what does this mean? By enabling and maintaining those regular contacts and those relationships with the post-secondary settings around the metropolitan area of Minneapolis, St. Paul, it gives us a tremendous amount of familiarity of services that are available on those individual campuses, how to plug those students into those services should they choose one of those locations, and actually gives us a level of familiarity for students that might be coming into the Twin Cities from outside the area.

It's not uncommon at all for us to hear, for example, from students who have come to the University of Minnesota from out of state. Maybe they're coming from Georgia or Louisiana or Maryland or New York or wherever, and they find themselves, students, at the University of Minnesota and are not well connected or aware of the resources in our surrounding community.

So by our staff maintaining those relationships with the universities, colleges, technical colleges in our metropolitan area, we can make those connections for the students and help them to getting to build some of those relationships for resources.

Our staff are also well known to several of the disability student services personnel. You may have mentioned within the college and post-secondary settings, all the colleges have disability services coordinators. And we maintain a strong relationship with all of those individuals around the metropolitan area so that if an issue comes up, we can easily step in to assist that student or, perhaps, to advise that student on how they might best strategize with that disability services coordinator to get those needs met.

So I've mentioned here just a couple of different examples. We also serve -- we had membership on several of the CTIC committees. CTIC is the Community Transition Interagency Councils. And most of the school districts around the state of Minnesota have CTICs.

And we select certainly, again, because of staffing patterns and we can't do everything and caseloads are large at MCIL as well, Nick, the young man that I mentioned earlier who is the staff member who's actually embedded in the school, carries a caseload of about 250 at any given time, plus managing some of the Web based service we provide.

He also maintains membership on about six or eight of the metro area. We select six or eight of the metro area CTICs that -- he maintains a membership on that committee as well.

Because, again, it allows us to come into those arenas, those spheres of influence, and introduce the IL philosophy into that process. Because as we all know, as we're working through the high school years, the CTICs are largely staffed by family and school personnel. There's not the inclination to embed that IL philosophy into that process.

So we work hard to make sure that, not only are we serving the students by assisting them with individual IEPs, but we're also addressing the transition needs of students with disabilities from the other direction, from the policy side and the practices and best services side as well.

>> CINDY: Who initiated your CTIC?

>> DAVID: The CTICs are actually mandated by the Minnesota Department of Education because all of the school districts around the state receive a certain amount of dollars specifically for transition services for youth with disabilities. So it's mandated by the Department of Education.

We also maintain memberships on committees and commissions and advisory boards, etc., at local post-secondary settings. For example, the University of Minnesota is the post-secondary setting that houses our university affiliated program in Minnesota. And I sit on one of the advisory committees there, as well as we have other staff that are on advisory committees and other metro area based community colleges, technical colleges, and four-year schools as well.

Again, participating from that perspective or from that side of issue, it allows us to influence, with the IL philosophy, the policy of best practices that are developed by those post-secondary settings. We always participate in annual statewide conferences to ensure awareness. So we do it from that said.

Now we also, obviously, participate more specifically with students, as you were discussing. So we try to assist students to conduct resource searches as part of that IEP process or that transition process into post-secondary. So, for example, we might be assisting them to do a more thorough search for loan or scholarship opportunities, identifying community based resources, and things like that in the community where post-secondary settings are going to be located.

For example, we may be working with a young person who resides in the Twin Cities, but they're going to be going to a southwestern state university in Marshall, Minnesota, which is about two and a half hours southwest of the Twin Cities. One of the things that we can do through our service is to work with that young person either through the IEP process or separately to begin to identify resources in that local community that would be available to them once they begin their post-secondary experience. So we want to prepare them for that journey, if you will.

We also provide advocacy assistance in dispute situations. For example, accessibility issues with post-secondary settings. We can work, again, one on one with that student, but making sure that they stay in the driver's seat. They may come to us to help strategize or develop their arguments that they're going to take back to that post-secondary setting.

We strive not to be their voice but to help them form those arguments. We may go with them. So when they have that conversation with the post-secondary setting, we may go with them to provide some rhetorical support or moral support. But we try very much to make sure it's their voice that's being heard.

But we get calls, and I'm sure you folks probably do too. We get calls an a fairly regular basis from young people who are at post-secondary settings that are having difficulty with accessibility issues or some other type of accommodations, and we can help intervene with that and provide assistance for that so that their post-secondary experiences are a little more meaningful and fulfilling.

How are we doing speed-wise? Are we doing all right? Okay? She says, well, okay. All right. I'll slow down a little.

We also can work with a student to provide connections through direct contact with, again, the disability student services at those post-secondary settings.

Again, this is the third time I've mentioned the living well with a disability curriculum. I talked with Darrell during the lunch break. We use this curriculum from a variety of different perspectives, obviously. You've seen it on three of my slides now. But I want to pause for just a moment to ask you folks, how many people here, since I've mentioned it so many times, how many people here are aware or knowledgeable of this particular curriculum? About a third. Okay. About a third.

I want to maybe just talk a little bit more, rather than just identifying some of the chapters here, but give you one of the reasons why we've chosen to use this particular curriculum and why it's been so very, very successful for us. And those of you who are in the room who have some experience with it, please feel free to chime in as well with your endorsement or your comments or whatever.

One of the nice things about -- and the title kind of says it all, living well with a disability. It's a curriculum that's really very helpful in providing information to individuals with disabilities about how to develop and maintain healthy lifestyles, how to live successfully in a healthy manner, in an effective manner with their disability. Rather than just trying to accommodate the disability into their life, but how to live a healthy life with the existence of their disability as well.

And we use it, not only in our transition program, but also in our peer mentor program and in our general IL program to provide this kind of instructional opportunity for young people and for adults with disabilities to kind of reverse maybe some bad habits that they have in their life or some habits that are -- I shouldn't say good or bad because that's judgmental. But habits that maybe are making them less healthy, whether it be physically healthy or relationship healthy or their ability to move successfully in and out of different situations in their lives and community.

So it's really a very valuable tool. It was developed by the University of Montana. And I was not aware of this until Darrell told me. I have no idea why this escaped me. But it is certified as Medicaid reimbursed. So the purchase of the curriculum is Medicaid reversible, and I did not know that.

So, Darrell, thank you so very much. And I know that also I wanted to mention Darrell showed me during the break on the Wiki site there are links on the ILRU Wiki site to the home page for the living well with a disability curriculum. So those of you who may not be familiar with it can link to it in that fashion.

Yes, Stevie, please.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Actually you just answered me question. I wanted to know how to access that. Thank you very much.

>> DAVID: You're welcome. I'm clairvoyant, you know. On the weekends, they call me Claire, by the way.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Okay. Thank you so much.

>> DAVID: You're welcome. Other questions?

Again, the living well thing, these are some of the additional -- yes, ma'am.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Can we go back to that Medicaid reversed or reimbursed on the curriculum?

>> DAVID: Yeah. Darrell, can you talk about that for a moment because you can do so more intelligently than I can.

>> DARRELL: I'm going to ask you to respond because my voice is having some difficulties.

>> DAVID: Thank you. They'll give you a more complete answer I think than I might be able to. Thank you, Richard.

>> RICHARD: The model that they have developed has been Medicaid reimbursed in Montana and it's been reimbursed in other states. That means that they have created a path that you can use within your state to go to your state Medicaid agency and arrange for Medicaid reimbursement of the services that you would provide if you were providing this curriculum.

And so it's not absolutely a done deal that you can make this happen in your state. But because it's been done in other states and because it's a Medicaid reimbursable service, it's been structured to be that. Your chances of getting that in your state are probably quite good.

>> DAVID: I just sent a note to my IL manager at our center after talking with Darrell saying are you aware of this. So we want to follow up on it.

Yes, ma'am.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hello. I just wanted to add a note more so than a question. In Kansas City, Missouri, the whole person, we use this course also. What we have done is we have collaborated with the schools, and we have got a lot of -- instead of going after school to teach the class and try to have to worry about transportation and how to get people there and stuff like that, the schools have actually made it a credit for the students to be able to join in on this course through school hours. So that's another thing that we have done to get the cores going and stuff.

>> DAVID: Fantastic. That's great. It's a wonderful application. We've actually at MCIL we've used the curriculum to replace some of our other general IL curriculum because it's so very, very useful. And it mines itself down to some of those basic levels for individuals with disabilities. So I'm glad to hear you say that.

Richard, you wanted to add?

>> RICHARD: Darrell whispered to me that she wanted to make sure we made the point about this. It's an evidence-based curriculum. Craig (indiscernible) and his team at the University of Montana have done research on this with this model. They've tested it in a number of settings, and it's been demonstrated to show real cost savings as far as medical services are concerned. So there are significant benefits to the curriculum and, that is one of the primary reasons that you probably have a very good chance to getting it approved with your state Medicaid agency.

>> DAVID: Thank you for making that point, Richard. One of the things that's important to remember about the curriculum, is that not only is it very, very instructional and informative for individuals with disabilities, but it has a preventative maintenance element to it as well that's very, very helpful. So, yes, absolutely.

I have a question over here, and then I'll come to you. Okay?

Yes, ma'am.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: We've taught it from our center also, and ADRS -- Alabama Rehab Services -- has paid for it.

>> DAVID: Fantastic. That's great to know.

Yes, ma'am. You had a question or a comment or a challenge.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: My question was (indiscernible) the schools come to our center. But I'm having a few problems because we have one or two aides that come into our center with the class. We have people that teach our curriculum. But some of the aides are like, oh, no, he or she can't do that. Oh, no, you can't do that. I'm like why are you judging the curriculum? Why do you think that student can't do that? Allow that student to try. Give them something to do at home. Oh, it's too stressful. No, no, no. And I'm just sitting back watching, wow, they're not even giving them an opportunity.

I'm also realizing some of the schools they have hire and lower learning mixed together, and they put them all in one class, and it's too big. And I'm thinking how are they going to be learning if there's such a big class with different levels. Do you know what I mean?

>> DAVID: I understand exactly what you're saying. I guess the easy answer is to ask the aides to just wait in the hallway while you do the class. You can't do that. I know. That was being flip. I think what you can do is spend some time maybe prior to the instructional period with those staff and orient them a little bit more thoroughly to the curriculum so that when you do bring it into the classroom situation, when they show up in time for the instruction, they're a bit more familiar with it and, perhaps, might be less likely to object it to because they have a greater understanding of it.

Yes, ma'am.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Real quick, David.

>> DAVID: Yeah. I just got my five minutes.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: I missed who was talking about the reimbursement, but I was wondering if there was someone who is willing to contact with them in case I came up with problems. I didn't catch people's names.

>> DAVID: It was Richard who was talking about it.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Who's willing to be a mentor for Connecticut?

>> RICHARD: I would strongly suggest that you contact Craig (indiscernible) at the University of Montana. And I think we have a link to that curriculum on the page that's with this training. And the reason we're saying contact them is that they're the ones who wrote the curriculum. They're the ones who developed it, and they're the ones who train you to use the curriculum. So that's why I would say contact the University of Montana. It's their baby, and they do it very well.

>> DAVID: Stevie, I'll come back to you in just a moment. I want to get through a couple of more slides, and then I'll come back to you. Is that okay? Thank you very much.

I just wanted to reinforce a couple of things that were already said, and that is start early. We try to catch kids around the age of 14 or sometimes a little bit younger as well, but the importance of starting early.

Set some goals to achieve, no matter the size. And the reason that I say that has been in response to a couple of the questions that came up earlier is because when we talk about managing those caseloads, one of the things that helps us manage the caseloads is making sure that the young person is actively engaged in that decision making process and managing their own IEP, managing the decisions that are being made during those transition years. That lessens the stress on the staff's part of having to manage that caseload because the student is taking a more active role on their own.

We have to take an active role in promoting that active role for the young person. So that's why I say set some goals to achieve, and no matter what the size of those goals are. And even if they're goals that can be achieved from one IEP meeting to the next or from one gathering with that student to the next.

But get them used to that. It's kind of like saving money. You pay yourself first every payday, even if it's five bucks. You pay yourself first, right? And you get used to that routine, and you don't miss the fact that 5 bucks is going into the savings because you don't count on having it to spend. It's creating that routine with the student of setting those goals and achieving them.

And we also work with them to find out who else can help. Maybe it's VR supports. I think somebody was mentioning before about SSI or SSDI or maybe some other types of VR supports. Maybe it's getting them connected, again, to the disability student services. School based guidance counselors, etc. Other community-based supports that might be readily available to them. Again, that student that's leaving the Twin Cities to go to another community to go to college, is there a Center for Independent Living in that community? Just getting them connected to some of those other supports.

One of the other things we do is really encourage them to participate successfully in the IEP meetings, and sometimes you have to force that. What I mean by that is if you make a consistent effort and turn to that young person and say, what do you think? Don't allow them to develop a passive attitude. You have to pull them out a little bit sometimes. You've got to pull them out of the shadows. And you do that by constantly putting the spotlight on them. Just say, what do you think? What would you like to do? How do you feel about this? People are talking about you, but you're sitting right here. What do you want to do?

Develop a personal file so that they can begin to keep their own records, and that's something that can travel with them when they leave high school and go into that post-secondary setting. They can take that file with them. And it's got, not just their educational records, but all their medical records, a copy of their birth certificate, their social security card, all these different things that are going to be necessary to them as they move from this secondary to the post-secondary setting.

Explore the big questions. This is one of those ways where you really begin to draw them out. What do you want your life to look like in a year, five years, ten years? Beginning to plant these seeds so that the young person starts to think about these things and begins to realize, and your underscoring with them, the realization that they really do have a say in this. It really is my life to plan. If you're going to sit back and let it be done to you, then you're not going to be very satisfied with the outcome. So what do you want your life to look like and what does that picture look like five, ten years from now? What school do you want to go to or what job do you want to have?

When my niece was three years old, we started her in this process. And my mother, God love her, her grandmother said, why are you concerned with her life at 21? She's only 3. And I said because the decisions we make now will have a direct impact.

It's the same with these young people who are 14 and 15 years old. What do you want to do for fun? And who do you want to get along with? Who do you want to take along with you? Start asking these questions so that the students have to start responding to them. Ta-da.

>> JUDITH: Thank you.

(Applause)

>> DAVID: I saw you coming. I didn't even have a cake.

>> JUDITH: Absolutely great panel, and a lot of good information. And maybe, David, if you can talk to Stevie during the break and make sure she gets her question answered.

>> DAVID: Yes, absolutely. I'll be right there, Stevie.

>> JUDITH: This room has gotten a little stuffy. So we're going to try to get a little more air conditioner in it. There's food out there for you. I know you're already hungry. So we'll see you back in 15 minutes. Thank you.

And thank you for everything.

(Break)