SIERRA ROYSTER: Hello.

Are you excited?

Is everybody going to go home and recreate all of those programs?

I wish.

I know who I want to be when I grow up.

It's a version of that.

So I'm Sierra again.

I'm from APRIL, the Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living.

So you have heard about the centers and the programs they are running out of there.

We're going to talk about the other two organizations that are a part of this, APRIL and NCIL.

Starting with APRIL, we are a national organization.

And we offer programs for young people, but I'm going to let Mary tell you a little about APRIL and then I will tell you a little bit more about me.

MARY OLSEN: Hello, Sierra made me come up here.

My name's not up there, so I thought I got a break.

So again, I'm from APRIL as well, director of training and technical assistance.

Sierra wanted me to give a brief overview of APRIL.

We are a national membership organization.

We have around 270 members across the country.

The reason why APRIL came about is we had our brothers and sisters at NCIL, the National Council on Independent Living and they started before us.

And what we began realizing was that there are issues that are really rural issues we can work alongside of them, to work on the issues that affect all of us.

But there are some of these things that are very rural itself.

So we had some folks help us with that.

The Research and Training Centers and some center directors from across the country got together and poof, APRIL.

That's how I imagined it.

There was like sparklies and poof.

So one of the main things that we talk a lot about is transportation and youth.

So we have been doing youth conferences and youth work at APRIL since it began.

How old is Mike Bears?

For that long.

For about 20 years.

And it's something that is a really big passion of ours.

One more little thing I wanted to touch on is when I say rural, I know a lot of you guys in the room might say, Oh that's not me.

We have a pretty creative definition of rural.

When I say rural, we mean anywhere where you don't have access to services.

So you know, we might have a big city like LA, but then when you drive 20 minutes out, you still might not be able to access transportation.

You still might not be able to access really good in-home personal care.

To me, that means you're rural.

If you're not able to access the resources that you need from the urban area, that's how we define rural.

That was my definition.

SIERRA ROYSTER: So I just wanted you guys to understand a little background about APRIL, and Mary thought she wasn't going to talk, so of course I made her.

So this is a little about me, because I want you guys to know what my background is a little bit so you know kind of where my passion began.

I started working at the center for independent living in Raleigh, North Carolina.

We were actually having a conversation with somebody earlier about, I didn't even know I was a person with a disability until I started working at the center and I was like, oh wait.

That's me, too.

I never knew that.

I started working as a youth outreach and advocacy specialist.

Long titles.

What I did was start youth programs.

My director had a huge passion.

She grew up in Kansas and didn't have any resources.

She was a person with a disability and didn't know anybody else with a disability, and she remembers what that was like.

When she started working with the center, that was one of the areas she wanted to see us fulfill.

This is before WIOA.

This was just, we serve people with disabilities.

That's also why I continuously say that because the youth programs that we have were before 2014.

So during my time there, we grew several programs.

We had a school program that was created with materials from across the country.

I actually went into the school the first day and had this book that was made and it was so pretty.

And I gave everybody a book.

Everybody had a book.

And they never opened it and they hated the first class.

So from there on, I decided okay, books don't really work.

They get enough of those.

And that's how actually a lot of our material got created.

We got creative and we started doing interaction and discussions and activities and that's how a lot of our youth programs started developing.

We had a youth group when I started there that was just a social group.

They got cookies and soda, and they spilled it all over our floor and then left every day.

And so what we did is started asking what did they want to learn.

And that's how the youth group took over what we were doing.

They told us what they wanted to learn.

Some months it was, we did fun things.

And then I gave them a budget and said here's the budget.

How are you going to do the fun things.

So that is when they started learning, okay, we have to not just spend endless amounts of money.

We have to fund raise and have bake sales and those types of things.

So they took ownership and planned the schedule every year.

Then we had the Youth Leadership Forum.

The Youth Leadership Forum started in 2008 in North Carolina, and then we took a year to do intake and that didn't go very well, because then it crashed.

So we started the Youth Leadership Forum.

We still have one up and running there.

We started, it is called Youth Move, and most states have a Youth Move organization.

It's for youth with mental health disabilities and it's an empowerment group.

They go and they learn how to advocate and they have different curriculums that you can go through and it's youth that run it.

It's important collaboration.

We started an LGBTQ+ group.

We had a healthy relationships class and we also work with consumers.

And I list all of those things to tell you that actually a lot of those came from when I started coming to workshops once I joined the center.

And I heard the issues around people wanting access to sexuality information or healthy relationships and defining that.

And so we said, Oh wait, we didn't even know that was an issue in our area.

How can we start that?

When I came home from the first training that I heard that, we didn't start it until a year and a half later.

But it's something that I put in the plan to work towards.

So I say all that, if you hear all the things that those two centers are doing, which are a lot and amazing.

It does not mean you can't do it now, maybe you figure out what that plan is and how that is gonna look for you a year or two from now.

So I've been on the SILC, so I had that fun experience.

I was an APRIL board member, I was one of the youth seats.

I was with Mike and Mary when we started the youth peer to peer program.

I'm going to talk about that.

And now I sit on the North Carolina Education and Employment Advisory

Committee.

We are writing, rewriting how students with intellectual and developmental disabilities get left out of education.

And they are not prepared for employment.

So they passed a law, and then they go, we don't know what to do with it.

So we come together as a group and we've talked about successful ways that are out there.

And then the SCAP member, that's to help with housing and to ensure that we have visibility in housing.

So now, our youth programs at APRIL.

So I talked about the youth peer to peer mentoring program.

I'm going to talk a little bit more about that, because it's kind of in-depth.

That has been going on for several years.

We have some material that we started collecting, and that's kind of where it started, is that we had a SILC to SILC at APRIL.

Where a SILC executive director or chair would go out and help the other SILC in another state.

A CIL to CIL, which was a center director going out to another center that needed help in a certain area.

And they would work together.

And then they started having conversations that young people, we want to have youth programs, but other people don't know how to do that.

But there are some successful youth programs out there and that's kind of how that got started.

We started looking at what you guys call best practices, I call practices.

What's best in some places may not be best in others.

So that experience, and we started pulling together different resources and that's where peer to peer mentoring really started.

We had certain youth go out to different centers and talk about how to start a youth program.

Or you have a youth group and you want to grow it, what does that look like?

It's kind of grown from there.

So we have a youth steering committee.

Our youth steering committee is made up of young people that we came together and Mary was there for that part of the history.

MARY OLSEN: Make me sound old!

SIERRA ROYSTER: You're not old.

I'm sorry.

We had young people that said we want to have a time for ourselves.

We want to do some skill building.

We want to have a conference for youth at the APRIL conference.

So that is what they created.

They planned it and they put together a budget and fundraiser and all those types of things.

So youth across the country developed a youth conference, and that's still going on.

It's on Friday, and actually I gave everybody on your table, you'll see postcards on there of save the date?

That's our youth conference.

And that's run by youth.

We have young people as chair, vice chair, treasurer, secretary, all those types of things.

And they talk about what do we want to see?

What do we want, when young people come to our conference, what do they want to learn about?

And that is really where it comes out from.

That information's on your table.

We also have other formats if you need it.

If you need another accessible format, please come see me.

And this is something new that at the youth conference every year, we had huge conference full of fun and everything, and then we do round table discussions and during those round table discussions, we broke up and talked about how youth are impacted in education, employment, transportation, health care, sexuality, you name it.

There was a topic.

And so we started talking about all of these things, if you had that area that you wanted to focus on and we come up with all of these ideas and then we'd go, all right, that was really great and then we'd leave.

You go back to your state and do that.

What happens when you leave a conference, which you're not supposed to do when you leave here, by the way.

You think about it.

It sounds really great, and then it kind of gets lost.

Your life picks right back up.

And that is what we were finding with lots of young people.

It was not that they did not want to do it.

Its that, they didn't have either the skills.

Like that's a great idea but I have no clue where to start in my state.

So out of that kind of has grown this youth advocacy committee.

This committee of young people it's made up of center staff that maybe have youth programs.

We have some center staff that actually have youth come to their center to join our calls during that time.

And so what they have come up with through this, we have done a survey and figured out what youth want, what are they looking for.

Through that we've been able to see that they want to learn the basic skills of advocacy.

What is the ADA and how does it protect us?

We know we should know it, but we don't.

And once we know what our rights are, how do we actually tell somebody that they're not giving us something that we deserve?

So we are actually getting ready to start an advocacy training.

That will be taking place over the summer.

It will be four meetings and we are going to be doing web meetings and we are going to be partnering up so youth can partner with another youth across the country.

We're going to have Summit from Montana, the center there.

They have a community center, if you would, it's called Base.

And they're going to do the self-advocacy training.

So that is something if you're interested in, we will be putting that registration up soon.

That will be an opportunity for young people and maybe even centers, center staff that are new.

How do you advocate?

How do you teach advocacy?

When you are looking at your community, what skills do you want to identify that maybe you don't have or that other people don't have and how do you educate them?

That's something that's come out of youth advocacy committee.

They're guiding us right now.

We just got off the ground and started in January, so it's really exciting to see the possibilities of where we want to go.

Once we get trained, we will then want to train others and we start talking about PTIs, was one of the examples, the Parent Training Institute on how they can be more open.

I like to say how to be more IL.

So this was something that we talked about last night, was the Walmart grant.

We worked with NCIL and AAPD on putting together some resources for mentoring.

There's the disability mentoring day where a young person can go out to a job that they may be interested in and mentor that job or job shadow for a day.

They expanded that and talked about internships and everything.

So we were kind of an advisor to that.

And another piece that is kind of interesting is how many of you have heard of AgrAbility.

A few people, a good number.

APRIL and AgrAbility have partnered this year, officially, we have worked together for years.

But we are officially partners.

One of the things that we are wanting to do, especially being the rural organization, is to look at agriculture.

So how are youth included in that?

Do youth think that is a viable employment for them?

Can they access the farm that they grew up on?

And maybe want to work on like their parents?

Or, when they get out of school, they couldn't get involved with their 4Hs.

They could not get involved with all those other organizations that deal with agriculture.

That's one area that we're going to start working on is trying to increase the education out there about the technology that is out there and opportunities that the agricultural business does have for youth with disabilities.

So that's an exciting new thing that we're doing.

And then the APRIL annual youth conference, which is the steering committee's work.

I wanted to give you a little more information on the youth peer-to-peer.

The youth peer-to-peer is where a young person that has worked in a center and they have started youth programs at that center.

They then, we have another center that doesn't have anything or maybe just have one program and they want to know how to expand it, or what to do next.

That person, center that wants to learn more, they apply.

And then we hook them up with a mentor.

Mentor goes out to that center for two days to do an on-site training.

On whatever the topic may be.

There are different topics that we consider expertise of our mentors.

And those are done individually.

So we look at the center and we go okay this is what you want to learn and this is the time track and we put some goals with that.

That's where the mentor comes in and helps with that piece and does some training.

After the mentoring is done and we talk about facilitation and how it may not look the same to a young person as it does to another group of individuals when you're working with a group.

So how do you facilitate young people to keep them engaged to actually let them know that they have a voice and that they can use it.

So we go over a lot of those different things.

And then the collection of material that I was talking about earlier, that is where we started.

All of the material that we continuously keep growing.

Then you get all that material.

Along with that, though, you can personalize it.

You can take it and make it your own.

You can add to what you're already doing.

And then you have that mentor's ear for another year.

So after that mentoring, that person, you can call them up and have regular phone calls of okay, I did step one of our goal, but now I don't know what to do.

I've got a meeting with the school system.

What do I say?

Okay I've got youth coming to our center but they're bored.

What do we do now that we've finally got them here?

So that is where that person can kind of help along that process.

If any of you are familiar with SILC to SILC or CIL to CIL, it's the same kind of process.

You kind of create goals, ideas.

We go through some of the activities that like when I worked at the center, I would run some of the activities that we did at the center and talk about how that activity you can teach in different ways and how it benefits you and how to actually keep them engaged or how to make an accommodation for a different disability and stuff.

That's really exciting.

So we have topics that include lots of different things.

We have actually extended it in the last year.

Recruitment, retention, IL history and philosophy, transportation, sexuality.

Those are where we started.

The list kind of goes on and on now.

Fee for service, youth leadership forums, it just goes on and on.

So we have different areas.

As centers are starting to do more things with young people, we are hoping to get that and help people along the way so we can all kind of learn from each other.

The other cool thing that we started doing in the peer to peers is our mentors have started doing trainings, so separate from the peer-to-peer training where they go out to a center.

we started doing calls where we have people come on and we talk about a certain subject for, I think the last one was on intellectual disabilities.

We had a young person from California come in and talk about their experience as a person with an intellectual disability and kind of what's helped them.

That was really awesome to have that person first experience.

And we had two mentors on that call that kind of led the discussion on what that can look like in a center when looking at that population.

What is something that may need to be modified but how they can be included just the same?

The first one we had was on intersectionality.

We have one coming up in June, and that is the other post card that you guys got.

The one coming up in June is fee for service for youth programs.

They were talking about the WIOA program we have that coming up as one of the topics and its really exciting what that center is doing.

Just different things as we identify different areas that maybe centers haven't ventured down or want to know a little bit more, that's a way to learn about that.

So I think that, there you go.

So CILs are here.

One of the things somebody asked me is can you pick my brain?

I don't know how much is going to be left by the end of the week, but that's one of the things we do.

Mary takes calls all the time, I take calls all the time, of hey, we have this center or youth program but I don't really know what to do with it.

Or this is where we really want to get going with our center.

What does that look like?

We kind of troubleshoot with you on a one-on-one basis.

The peer mentoring I mentioned, if that is something that interests you.

And then a lot of opportunity for your young people that want to get engaged on a national level.

If you want to join the calls and bring your youth into that, there's a lot of opportunities and that's what we're hoping to create.

Not just a local opportunity but the youth that really want to expand that to have those opportunities there.

And then the topical trainings that I was talking about. That's a little about what APRIL is doing.

We've just gotten started.

Going fast in the last year.

So we're excited about where that's going.

I think Kings is coming up to tell you about NCIL.