**DISABILITY, DIVERSITY, AND INTERSECTIONALITY**

**IN CILs: RURAL OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT**

**Presented by Kim Gibson and Liz Sherwin**

**July 9, 2019**

>> Good afternoon and welcome to today's webinar. Diversity, rural outreach and engagement. I'm Carol Eubanks with ILRU and joining me is Judith Holt. Judith is our colleague from Utah State University center for persons with disabilities who has been a part of the IL net team for many years and worked with ILRU on the Disability, Diversity, and Intersectionality project since it began in 2017. Today's presentation is brought to you by the IL net training and technical assistance project for CILs and SILCs. Operated through partnership through Independent Living research utilization. National council on Independent Living Association of Programs for rural Independent Living and Utah State University center for persons with disabilities with support provided by the administration on community living at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This webinar is being recorded and will be available on demand within a few days. You can go to ILRU.org where you will find all of the materials for the presentation including the PowerPoint, audio, transcript and any other supplemental materials that may be posted subsequent to this presentation. Today you will have an opportunity to ask questions during the webinar. If you move your curser on the screen, you should be able to see a bar at the bottom and there in the middle one of the options is Q&A and you can use that to type questions at any time and we will address them during our Q&A breaks. If you have a comment for us that is not a question, you are welcome to use the chat feature. Captioning will also be available by opening the CC tab on the main screen. Please know that with captioning you can change the size of it. If you are only seeing one line of captioning, you can put your curser over it and you should see an arrow that you can click to make the captioning larger and display seven or eight lines of text once you do that. If you prefer, you can view the full screen captioning. You are welcome to log into the chat there and enter your questions and we will respond to them during our Q&A breaks as well. You can find the URL in the chat on the main webinar screen. And one final bit of housekeeping, at the end of the webinar, an evaluation form will open in your web browser. Please, do fill this out. It's short, easy to complete, and we use them to improve the work we do here in the future.

I would like to introduce our presenters for today, Kim Gibson and Liz Sherwin. Kim accepted position as executive director of disABILITY LINK and moved to Texas. She served as executive director at two other centers for Independent Living where she gained knowledge to expand programs with the focus on diversity and inclusion. Kim has received numerous nominations and awards for her disability work including the 2014 national council on Independent Living, women's caucus Hall of Fame award, the award was given for her mentorship to other women in the world of disabilities. Kim serves as a peer mentor through the IL net SILC to SILC peer mentor program managed by April. Liz Sherwin is executive director at Illinois Iowa Independent Living center. Liz has been employed by the Illinois Iowa center for Independent Living since 19.

8 and became the executive director in 1998. The center is a civil rights and advocacy non‑profit corporation that serves people with disabilities in western Illinois and eastern Iowa. She is President of the Iowa statewide Independent Living council and facilitator for the Iowa state association for Independent Living. And a board member of the Illinois network of centers for independent living. Liz's past President of the Association of Programs for rural Independent Living and serves as a peer mentor through the IL net peer mentor program managed by April. Welcome, Liz.

>> Welcome. I'm nervous as I told you earlier.

>> No problem.

>> I guess what I would like to start out with is talking about how it's important for centers to be part of the community. And one of the guiding ‑‑ for us what we do is we are the community. The people that we hire in our center and our board members and our membership are all part of the community. So when we are out doing things and trying to encourage participation in or services and programs, we actually are the community so we develop a trust with those people in the community and they feel that we are part of them. And some of the things we will talk about are how we came to that position in the community and some of the things that we have done enable to be successful in our community because our community is very diverse. Right along the Mississippi between Illinois and Iowa, it is very populace and this is the metropolitan area where as you get into the outlying counties they are very rural and they are diverse. You will mostly see cows and hogs and a lot of corn and soy beans. And those are the communities that it is a lot of times difficult to reach because we have one center and it's located in the metropolitan area but the other thing is that if we located in the metropolitan area, how are we to serve and address the needs of those people in the rural community.

So early on when we became a center, we talked about that. We did some strategic planning. We brought different people such as legislators and all types of people to kind of figure out how we can do that. And one of the things we thought about was how since we are in a metropolitan area, how we would be able to reach out to those rural communities and develop relationships out there that will in turn create an atmosphere to develop consumers and programs that would benefit people with disabilities. And some of those strategies worked and some of them didn't, but we kind of looked at all of them to determine what was best for our community because each rural community is different. No community is the same so there is no plan that's going to fit everyone. So there will be hit and misses but we kept trying and in the end we were able to do some things that were positive in the rural community. And our community the majority of people are Caucasian. I think the Caucasian population is around 87% and the rest demographics are African‑American, Asian, Hispanic, and then some of the new refugees that have come to the country from Africa the Sudan and various places. But the issue is how do you reach and serve those people. And hopefully my discussion today will give you some insights in how you may be using those strategies for your community.

And briefly I think I talked about the issues of reaching rural communities. A lot has to do with distances in our area because like I said we are located in a metropolitan area and the distance round trip to some of our counties that we serve is probably three hours, maybe. It just depends where we are in Illinois or Iowa. And there are limited resources in most rural communities. They lack health care delivery systems. A lot of the hospitals that we are in those areas have closed. A lot of the people that live there they have to ‑‑ they actually travel distances to get to work. And many of the area is populated by farmers and people like that and we know that there is a high incidence of injuries with the farm workers and how do we work for those people. And there are just few resources. Many times they are not even things that are a major grocery store or whatever in those areas. And so how do we reach people in those areas.

One of the things we talked about was obviously there is a lack of transportation and there is no public transportation in many of these communities. So obviously these people are not going to be able to come to our center. So we talked about ways to reach those people. Occasionally it had to do with partnering with agencies or identifying agencies within those communities that were willing to let us have office hours instead of 30 days to actually be there and available to consumers to work on whatever issues they had. It could be both security dis‑‑ Social Security disability applications. It could be identifying ways where they could build ramps or just all sorts of things. So we partner with agencies in those locations to figure out how to reach people.

Another thing was travel. We knew in terms of travel for staff as they developed consumers in those areas they need to figure out a way to get there. Therefore we allotted a travel budget that allowed them to reach people in distant communities so they would continue to provide the services that we provide in the metropolitan area. And then in addition to that, there is the issue of diversity. Even though many in the community that are predominantly white, there are people there that are Hispanic, there are African‑Americans and whatever, what are the agencies out there that can give us access to these communities. Many times it may be the churches or it may be the community action agency. It could be any agency that we could partner with and develop a trust and relationship with.

And I think we kind of touched on the differences in those areas. And a lot of people in those areas, a lot of the young people have left so the population is aging, therefore, we know there are many people out there that could benefit from our services and we talked about the racial and ethnic groups and how do you find and identify them and we talked about the issues of disability. Many of the people that have ‑‑ in those areas are socially, economically challenged, I guess you could say. They didn't have the resources to move so they are in their little communities and many times isolated. There are also the issue of sexual orientation. And many other things. Most of the things that happen in metropolitan communities are happening in rural communities but they may be happening at a different rate. So we wanted to address the possibilities of what we could accomplish if we tried to reach out and identify those particular groups.

The first thing we looked at when we were trying to find out information about the group was to actually look at the demographics in our 704 report. Who we were actually serving, where they were, and that sort of thing. That was the first thing we looked at. And then we tried to at least identify some of the groups that were in our community and we actually looked by state and county in terms of the population in the group and once we identified those populations, we kind of discussed where it would be best to locate and again contact. For instance, in one of the counties in Iowa Muscatine County which is one of the more rural counties we went to some of the organizations that were already there. They had little small groups and in most rural communities we found at least in our area is that they kind of grouped together the service providers in informal settings to discuss ways to improve services to their community. So therefore we became a partner with them and started attending their monthly meetings which they met normally at least probably seven or eight times a month ‑‑ I mean, excuse me, a year. They always didn't want to meet in the summer, but they would meet during the year. And then they would talk about different issues that were going on and if there were things that the agencies that were participating could work on, then we would figure out a way to work on it and we became part of that. And one of the rural counties in Illinois they did not have information actually on everybody in the county that was providing services to the people in the county. They were working on what they called a directory for ten years, but the directory actually was sheets of paper and sticky note pads and whatever at somebody's desk or somebody's file and that was the way of somebody called and they wanted this or that, then they would look for these sticky notes or they would look for this pad to find out the information on the specific service.

So what we did was back then ‑‑ and that was awhile ago, we did have an active computer system and we had a full time secretary at the time. So I volunteered the fact that if we could come together and get a complete list of what was going on in the county, then our agency would actually compile all of that information into some kind of little directory. Well, everybody was happy about that, and we were able to accomplish that within like probably six months and there were many agencies participating but it ended up like three agencies actually doing the work. The center, a community action agency, and a senior center. So we had all of the information and we compiled it and gathered to some type of format and we eventually threw it to our secretary and she says: What is this mess? It was hand written in all types of format. She worked on it and it became a directory. And how these agencies in the county supported and benefited us? They in each directory it was printed that this was a resource of Illinois/Iowa center for Independent Living. So everybody got that information about us.

And we shared it. They shared it with police departments, health departments and everyone. So we kind of became a known entity in that community.

In one community we worked with one of the power companies and they actually was willing to send out information flier about our center and that sort of thing. I know it's unheard of a lot, but someone had con ‑‑ had contact with the power company and we were doing some type of event and they agreed to send out our slide with all of the billings for that month. So we have done all sorts of things.

And like I said, this here lists a number of sources and gives you ideas of where you can get information. And what we found in a lot of places like in the Latino community they tend to support their people. They take care of granny and grandpa and whatever and they don't necessarily look to the outside for people. So the concept of the Independent Living philosophy was kind of vague to them where people came into your home and assisted you and did that sort of thing. So we had to work with people within those communities to identify the benefits and the services that we could provide for them. And then we tried to determine we had various people that we worked with that were actually part of the community and we had them giving us feedback on to what we could do or how we could better reach those people what are some of the services and programs that would really benefit the community because we decided we were not going to go in and tell the people what they needed. We wanted them to identify what they needed. Not us telling them. Because we found us going in and talking about the philosophy and promoting everything that we do is not the way we need to identify and find out what it is the community feels are the things that they need. Then work with the organizations that already exist and get them involved in the center and our whole concept of Independent Living and what centers can do to ‑‑ people with disabilities in all parts of the community. And some of the outreach strategies we did, well, they had various and sundry groups that were doing various things in the community. They had information fairs. They had group of business people that were meeting generally. So we kind of joined those groups in one of the small counties in Iowa they have ‑‑ actually have a Chamber of Commerce. It's not what you would expect in the large community, but it is a chamber so we joined the Chamber of Commerce to reach more people and let them know about the services and the benefits of the centers.

We worked a lot with the Hispanic chamber. The NAACP and all sorts of organizations that serve people with disabilities. We actually did some diversity training with the new immigrants to the community. So there were issues with the police and communications and the barriers to understanding the new culture as well as there is issues with people with disabilities where they actually stop people who were Deaf and the person didn't respond and the police felt they should respond and they had some issues. Therefore we worked because of the communication barrier people, people with disability with experiences as well as the new immigrants, we did a number of diversity trainings with the various departments and agencies in the community to improve their communications with the groups and to identify people in these particular groups that would be able to work and bridge the gap between the people who have disabilities as well as people who have language barriers.

One of the things we found with the Latino community we really wanted to serve people who are Latino, therefore, we contracted with a person to translate all of our information into Spanish. Well, we found out that wasn't a good idea because the person had created the fliers or translated them into a real upper class language that many of the Latinos that we were going to work with didn't understand. So we had to go back and we had to regroup. Another thing we actually had a brochure that worked, but when people called in to our office, we didn't have anybody on staff that were Latino. So that was an issue. So like I said, there were things that we had to learn along the way. So then we knew we needed to find somebody on staff that could actually speak the language so that had us ‑‑ that prompted us to do a search and try to identify someone that could really, truly communicate with people if they called our office. And a lot of times there are stereotypes of cultures and we have issues a lot of times understanding cultures. In the African‑American community one of the things that may be true in other cultures, too, is that they want to break bread with you. If you go to their home or whatever, they will offer you a treat, coffee or they will offer you something. Well, I have a staff person that came back and she was very upset. She could not reach this particular African‑American woman. She was maybe 80 years old and the woman kept offering herself and she couldn't figure out and she said no, why the woman seemed really to disconnect with her. So we had to talk to her about that.

In another instance one of the staff came to me and she was very upset because the staff had told her certain things about African‑Americans and she didn't want to offend me being African‑American. So she said, Liz, I don't want to offend you before I bring this up and what she wanted to bring up was the topic of watermelon. And I guess I didn't know about these issues. She says, well, Liz, when I was a kid she went through this rigmarole we were really poor and white and it was really nice to have a treat, a nice cold watermelon in the summer. It was really a treat for us. And I said, yeah. She said, well, we do the Martin Luther King, Jr., festival each year and I was wondering if I could have watermelon for a treat for the kids. And I said, well, how many do you want to buy? And she still was looking at me really confused. And I says ‑‑ I said, well, what's wrong? And she says, well, I was told by the other staff and back then I was the only African‑American on staff, that you don't bring up watermelon and fried chicken with black people and I said, oh, I didn't realize that. So anyway, within our own staff there were issues that we had to talk about and discuss to better serve people in the community. And we worked a lot with different leaders in those communities and we tried to identify people that would bring us the best information.

A lot of times the information you get is not information that is correct. You have to identify people who know what is going on in the community, the needs of those communities and people that are respected within those communities. And all during the process we developed a surveys and they are very simple. We do little post card surveys. We will send out to various people that we are serving to identify if our services are good or if they are bad, if they have issues, and each survey that we get back we don't get all of them back, we probably get maybe ‑‑ I would say maybe 10% back in any given year. If there are issues in those surveys, we as a team review them and we work on whatever they are and try to improve our services.

One of the things we needed to identify early on we needed to build partnerships with many of the diverse organizations. The Martin Luther King, Jr., center has been around for probably about 60 years now and then also there is an active club of seniors at the center and they are like ‑‑ probably about 100 senior citizens that are 55 and over and we work with them on different projects. They have Christmas events. And they also have other events. And we partner with them and work with them.

The rock county NAACP is a group we work with as well as the metro ‑‑ in Iowa. One of the things we found when a lot of the new housing rates changed was that many people with disabilities as well as African‑Americans were diversely impacted by the loans that talked about who can live in public housing. And one of the things had to do with people that may have different types of criminal records. And we were having a problem because we had to go and try to get things weighed and so forth and so on. And we also found that this was going on with other groups. So we did what we called expungement workshops. In Illinois there is something called the advocates for whatever and they are actually a national group that ‑‑ not a national but it's a statewide group that actually worked with getting people's recorded expunged for certain types of infractions. So we were able to bring these people in once a year. They would talk to people how to expunge some records and the attorney would actually sit down as they would have their sentencing information and work with them. We usually would get 30 to 40 participants. People with disabilities, people who were otherwise impacted and we would sit down and work with them through this particular attorney from the office of the appellate defender in Illinois and routine thing that we have been doing for probably the last 15 years.

In your community it just depends on what your community looks like and what the needs are. And if there are different things that you could work on, work on with those groups and then that gets your name out and it gets the information about you, et cetera. In fact, we did something called the NTC11 clean-up. We live on a state highway, at least our center does, and it's not very clean. And I found when we first built the new building here, came into the office and says why would you want to build this nice building in the ghetto? And I had never thought of the location as being a ghetto. But one of the things agencies have been trying to do with non‑profits is clean up this particular area and neighborhood. So they came up with a clean-up day on May 11 of this year. And so somehow I volunteered and never know when to keep my mouth shut, but I volunteered to organize this which I did. I worked with the city. I worked with the Park Department and all types of groups to bring an emphasis to the project we were working on. We actually got like a full page spread in something called religion and values page of the newspaper. And they prominently listed our center as a spare ‑‑ spearheaded for this particular group. And we had a very good day. It was actually raining that day and as any of you know in the Mid-West has been horrible in terms of the weather this past winter and spring. So we actually had 100 volunteers that showed up to clean up 11th Street. So that was one of the things and one of the agencies ‑‑ just before our presentation she came in with a little goody bag for us. And she had Twizzlers and M&Ms and all of that sort of thing and as a thank you for us participating and supporting this event. And I think we were also recognized by the city council, too.

So there are a lot of ways that you can look around your community and get positive support from the community if they know you are there and if you are willing to help.

>> Liz? Hi, this is Carol. I just want to let you know that we are quickly running a little behind so just wanted to let you know. Thanks.

>> Okay.

Another thing is I think we already talked about making sure information that you provide is understandable for people. Another thing to look at is making sure if you have printed material and things of that nature the material reflects what your community looks like. So that's in terms of diversity in terms of disability, in terms of whatever. So if you are putting that information out to the public, make sure that it truly represents the community, whatever is going on with it.

And the other thing is making sure that you are getting positive feedback from the community. We also spend time if there are issues in the newspaper, we will do things on the opinion page and whatever to become more participatory. So if there are issues about disability or issues about various and sundry populations that we may be representing, we will write articles in the opinion page and maybe six months ago one of the papers contacted me ‑‑ they wanted a person to write about disability. They wanted that person to be ‑‑ I'm not sure if would pay them but they wanted them to be available to write an article on disability periodically. So one of my former board members and she recently came back to the board she agreed to be that person. So it was a local paper she will actually be doing articles on disability from time to time in the newspaper.

The other thing make sure that the information that you are providing is consistent. Create some kind of media package that at least identifies and creates an image of who you are in the community one of the things we have done here is we had a lot of information from news articles to whatever about our center. So I had someone come in and create these shadow boxes and they are huge. They are probably 15 by 20 feet along our walls so it gives a history of our center from the day we opened until we moved ahead. And I have already talked about the media. And we take advantage of any opportunity we can get to promote our center and we work with agencies. We have a website and we have dates and we also recently created a Facebook page. So we have all sorts of things that we do.

>> Hi, Liz. This is Judith. I'm so sorry to interrupt but we are ‑‑ we have a lot of folks with questions and we are kind of need to stay on a time line. Would you be okay to respond to some questions? You have some wonderful information that you've shared.

>> Sure, no problem. I talk too much.

>> Oh, wonderful. Great information. Someone has asked and you mentioned it but when you are looking for an organization in rural areas where we know there may not be many organizations, where do you suggest that the SILC start if they want to connect with an organization that serves racially and ethnically diverse populations.

>> One of our communities it was the hospital and then there are community action organizations. Community action agencies and I believe they have them all over the country.

>> Liz can you tell me more about how you connected with the hospital? That's really interesting.

>> Well, one of the things was the LI V‑group of rural agencies that was serving the community they had a meeting at the hospital. A lot of groups because there are not a lot of places to meet in those communities, they have ‑‑ they have their meeting sites at the hospital sometimes. So we found out about those meetings and we started going to them. And they were like probably round trip a couple of hours. It was in ???? County, one of ‑‑ very, very rural counties. And then we worked with one of the churches there, one of the Catholic Churches. I know that many people think, oh, Hispanic are Catholic but that is not true but in this particular county they were so we worked with the Catholic Church there to identify people.

>> Okay. Those are really excellent ideas, both linking with hospitals and especially where rural area has a hospital and meeting with other groups. Do you have any other ‑‑ you mentioned immigrant populations. I know you talked about translating your materials to Spanish and some of the challenges there. Have you tried to translate any of them into other languages?

>> No. We haven't because well, I thought it may be a possibility, but we went to the local high school and they said they had 90 different die elects at the high school ‑‑ dialects at the high school so that wasn't practical. So we have a particular group that's called the quad city refugee counsel or something like that and a lot of those people work together to improve communication. So we work very closely with them and I think you remember that we worked with them to identify issues that the police and some of the service agencies were having when they were trying to provide services for different disability populations as well as the immigrant populations. So we work with them. On occasion they have those people who have needed our services and they will send along an interpreter with them.

>> Okay, great. And those are good suggestions because you don't always have the resources to translate materials into every possible language. We have another question that's come up and you mentioned something that I thought was really important and that was understanding other cultures values and the value of for instance having a cup of coffee or having something with them when they offer you something. Someone has asked, is it inappropriate or even unethical to accept gifts including food from consumers? And I know from my own personal experience working with different diverse populations that often when you sit down and have a cup of coffee or tea and you are visiting with folks, it's a time when they feel comfortable with you and open up. How do you respond to that, Liz, about it being inappropriate or unethical?

>> Well, I told my staff and this is kind of our policy here, if people ‑‑ if this is a way of connecting with people and this is ‑‑ I mean, I think you can get a sense of what is going on. I mean, I don't think I would support extravagant gifts, but a cup of tea, a coffee is fine. And the other thing that we had people that were Chinese that we served. It was some kind of ‑‑ I let them use our building and we let ‑‑ use our building, but they were so thankful they gave me some kind of little memento, I don't know what it was. I don't know what it was, but they gave this to me because they were appreciative of us letting them use our site. The Native Americans, they were trying to create a powwow or some such event because they hadn't been able to do it for a certain period of time. So actually when they had their powwow, they asked me to come out and I guess I did some kind of a ceremonial dance with them and then they gave me food. That type of thing. But I think that was fine. I mean, because this kind of made us more inclusive.

>> Okay. Someone has posted on the chat that Google ‑‑ some people use the Google app to help with translation. I wanted to go back to that for a minute. This is a good question. You do so many things. What works best for advertising in rural areas? What is your best advertising getting the word out kind of strategy for rural areas?

>> In hospitals in the rural communities and so are newspapers. So what we do we do have a Facebook page and I think that's garnered a lot of attention because what we do is we post all of our events. We post information on our website. That's really helped. Another thing is when they are having their fairs such as the county fairs and that sort of thing, and I'm a person that don't like outdoors. I don't like animals or anything like that so usually one of the staff will attend those things. The county fairs. They will have information, we will have a booth and we will have information. And any other fairs that ‑‑ with community activity that go on routinely we will try to have a table and a booth that talks about our services.

>> That's great. Carol and Sharon, I wondered if you wanted to open it up to see if there are people on the line who would like to ask a question. We have a couple more minutes for questions still.

>> Okay, and for anybody who wants to submit a question, open up that Q&A tab at the bottom of your screen and type it in and we will certainly get it asked.

There is another one here and we have some time before we get Kim on, how did you get folks to show up for interviews and focus groups?

>> Well, at one time we were a very pretty center. We had issues. We were not reaching people. There were all sorts of issues going on. And we knew that if we were to provide, we needed to find out what really was wrong with our center and I think we knew what was wrong but we didn't want to admit it until people came in and they talked about the lack of follow‑up. They talked about all sorts of things. So we looked at all of this information and we figured out how best to address this. We used that to improve our services.

>> Wonderful. And there is another one here. How do you connect to the schools in the rural communities if you are from the metropolitan area?

>> Right now we have something called a transition grant. And what we are supposed to do is identify those children that are, you know leaving high school and a lot of times they find out that they don't know where to go and they don't know about the training, work or where. So we are working with them and one of my staff is developing focus groups with these young people and their parents to try to determine how best we can serve them, what are the resources that we can provide. We actually have done college tours with them. We have done retreats with them. And all of those kinds of things to actually work with the schools. And what we found, we have been had ‑‑ we have had more success in the rural counties than we actually did in the more populace counties with more resources. Back in I believe it was probably May of this year we identified about 18 students with disabilities from the very rural counties and we were able to take them on a tour of one of the colleges. The college actually provided meals and treats for them while they were there. They gave them a tour of the college. They talked to them about education possibilities and other things.

>> Good. That's nice. Okay. Another question and actually there are two that these might go together, the first one is what types of organizations are most open to think about what they do in terms of disability and then someone else said I'm curious about the national policies of these organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and NAACP and the united way, are people with disabilities on their radar generally from your experience?

>> Well, I would say not necessarily. And what we do is we become members of these organizations. We are members of the chambers in our communities and if they have various business murals or whatever because we actually are a business. We are doing ‑‑ joining those people and bring up the issue and discussion about disability because it's not going to generally be at the forefront of these people because it's either creating new business or discrimination or whatever the organization is. So we have to bring up the issue of disability as how it relates to everything in the community.

>> Well, we don't have any more questions right now. Anyone else want to jump in here? Okay, then I guess we will get started with Kim. Take it away!

>> Hi. So I'm Kim Gibson. I'm from disABILITY LINK in Tucker, Georgia. And I want to give a first just a slight background disABILITY LINK where we serve metro Atlanta area and when people think metro Atlanta area they think this large thing and how can it relate to different populations. So we serve actually metro population. We serve urban and we also have very rural areas. And I come from a background where the first center for Independent Living that I was an executive director for Independent Living specialist was very rural. So all of that history and knowledge kind of ‑‑ play into what we are trying to accomplish here as far as inclusion and diversity.

So the very first thing that we thought about when we are talking about inclusion is like my quote said one of the major practices is the inclusion of people that starts at the front door is inviting to all. That's not just meaning with physical, but also on the phone, on our web page or whatever you see. So when we first ‑‑ when you talked about that, we have a welcoming door thing that says, welcome to disABILITY LINK when you are walking by the door. And I purchased it off Amazon for $9. And when you think about what that means to individuals as first it says welcome to anybody who comes through the door, but also people that are physically impaired or blind have kind of a signal as to here is the front door. I don't have to sit there and try to hunt for. When you walk through our doors all of the posters and everything is reflective of our population. And it's welcoming. And so when people come in, even for interviews, the very first thing we hear is, when I sat at that front door I felt welcome. I felt like this was an open place. People are happy. They are happy to be here and that's kind of what you want to hear when you are looking at, is it inviting to all?

So the very first thing I did and we did as a unit was we took the inventory of our staff and our board membership and our consumer population. We took a look at the U.S. census, United States census and around metro Atlanta and all of the little stacks they had out there and we compared it to our 704 report, at that time the annual 704 report, the PPNR. It's important to note that we still look at that every single year. So it's not like a one-time thing. You will have to do it all the time. You will have to compare it and say where do we need to improve? What do we need to do? So at that time and it's pretty reflective still of what we are. We have about around disability links pop ‑‑ disABILITY LINKs population is around 63% of Caucasian and white and then 71% of black and African‑American and then we have a population of 20% and then several different other races, Asian is a high population. And it's also important to note that depending on which county or which town or whatever we are serving is really reflective of the population we are serving. And I know from experience in Wyoming if you are in certain part of Wyoming you are going to be around Native Americans more than others. We actually have one of the most diverse cities in the United States in our service area which is Clarkston, Georgia, which has a high refugee, high immigration and very diverse population overall. So we took a look at that and we compared it and said how are we doing there?

And then after we did that, after we took a look at that, we said, you know, let's gather surveys for the community and feedback from the community we serve with surveys on what is your interests? What's your comment? And we also asked board members, you know, what ideas can we do better? What's there to being ‑‑ what can we do better? And we encouraged staff. When you empower staff to actually bring forth ideas, it brings out a certain sense of pride that these programs are going to happen. That different things ‑‑ you know, I'm going to take ownership of this and make this successful. So we gathered that feedback and said, you know, what interests you? What doesn't interest you? And many of our different programs and I can't remember from the slides developed because of that. We had several staff members that I identified in the LGBTQI p population some so we developed a group LGBTQIAP plus disability and then we had great sense with police brutality here in Atlanta because several different individuals were affected because of that. So we developed a group and we reached out to different organizations. The NAACP, Black Lives Matters. All of this was brought upon with a staff, with consumers, and we developed a group called us protecting us. The group named it themselves.

Reaching out to the community and bringing back is really key. How do you do that and we even have a form that staff submit that says, I have this great idea for a workshop and this is what I would like to do. So our groups aren't ran by just our workshops aren't ran by just staff. They are ran by board members. They are ran by consumers. And so that input was very valuable. So getting that feedback is important.

Community engagement is really important. And when you are thinking about how you can reach out to rural communities. How do you do that? How do you get there ‑‑ I have this rural community four hours from my center for Independent Living? That means you will have to look for a common ground somewhere in that community and do these same kind of workshops or like we did and I'm sure I will talk about it later in my slides is using Zoom technology. So all of our workshops no matter what you can log in and you can participate through Zoom. If a consumer says, well, I don't have a web cam, we have stack of web cams we send off to consumers. We have donated laptops and we always advertise for donated items for individuals that may not have access to that computer access. Zoom is available which this is Zoom that we are on is available through web, through telephone, through land lines. So it really, really is helpful.

Also making sure that you are engaged in your community. So we participate if social justice events. Martin Luther King, Jr., day parade. You would think that a disability community would not be the one that was head streaming that. But when it was first initiated years ago it was because disABILITY LINKs stepped up and said hey, disability rights is a civil right. How can we promote that together and that's how the MLK parade in Atlanta actually started. It didn't start from a different group which you wouldn't think that. And then the pride parade. We participate in that. And then different voting events. All, everywhere. We take it to the ground. To the community. We utilize libraries. We utilize community centers. We utilize parking lots. We utilize whatever organization we can out there.

I'm not sure if I froze or not. Does anybody hear me?

>> We can hear you and see you just fine. You are good.

>> Okay, good. And then hosting workshops on diversity. We provide ‑‑

>> Uh‑oh.

>> Our board members when they first come in. It's a three‑day long training that we provide the l that includes the topics on diversity. But we also do different workshops on different diversity topics and we have one that's called nothing but us without us which talks about your advocating rights and stuff like that. And we also just ‑‑ we key in on whatever the diverse population might be. And using that feedback, back from what the community said was of interest and like I said earlier, it can't just stop there and you continue on. So it's always changing. And then there may be something that nobody is interested in any longer. It's something that was at that time important to the community. And it's okay to say, you know, this no longer works. It needs to be something else. We want to do this instead because that was something in the past. So it's ever growing and always looking at different things.

So I was talking about, how do you reach the rural populations? And taking my experience from a very rural area, population of 525,000 in the whole state to a population I now serve in the millions, you look it's all the same. You have to do the community outreach and the participation and the different health fairs. You go to support groups. I have my staff look at ‑‑ what support groups are there? TBI support groups, all primary support groups, what kind of support groups can you get out and do some presentation and let people know about you. Senior centers, churches, we participate in the international days.

One of the things after you start really getting out and you network and you let your ‑‑ let people know about it, you start getting invited to things. We do the social debate, social justice debates at Morehouse College, and just all kinds of things like that. One thing that I have to say about that's really important when you do the community outreach and participating in the things that you follow‑up and that's really important. And then you also give your staff or give staff or direct staff or however you want to call it the opportunity to do what they are interested in. That gives a certain passion that can't be replaced by anything. So if you are passionate about housing, that's something that your staff should be allowed to do. Don't ‑‑ sometimes people squelch staff down to this is what I want you to do and you stay in your lane and this and not bringing forth ideas. We have a really open communication and letting people think about what can we do, what can I do in order to ‑‑ what interests me? And that's what I want to participate in. So somebody is really into churches and they like to religious aspects, they are going to be the best person to go to the churches and do outreach as opposed to somebody that is not really religious. They may be spiritual but not religious or they may be an atheist and they don't want to be in there. And also have to look at Muslim, Jewish communities, all of that kind of thing that falls into that.

And then use a partnerships for meeting spaces is really, really important. We use vocational rehabilitation offices. We use libraries. We've used book stores. If there is an open room we ask for it. And usually it's for free. We also open up our doors for meeting spaces. And that's how we got the group ‘Just Us Blind Girls’ meeting here now, once a month, because we open up our doors to the community as well as asking the community to work with us. So that really ‑‑ that partnership knowing that really is the best word out.

Then increased visibility in school. I heard somebody ask, how do you get in the rural schools? You attend their transitional school fairs. You reach out to the schools and say hey, I would like to do a presentation or can I participate in your health fair or your whatever fair that you happened to be holding in that community, I would love to be a part of it. Or can I come teach a class. So we do a lot of pre‑transitional ‑‑ the pre‑‑‑ some are fee for service and some aren't. We run a wonderful ‑‑ I always say wonderful, right? Wonderful summer program which kids come here from ‑‑ some of them it takes them an hour and a half for them to get here because of the transportation ways, but its Monday through Thursday, four and a half hours a day during the summer that they are here and we have a curriculum that we utilize. We also take it to the schools and so the schools talking to them, you know your foot in the door when you are first there, they are really, maybe, you can do one class and then the next thing you know they are trying to get you to come four or five days a week. You just have to be careful. Hey, we aren't here for baby‑sitting but we are here to create independent opportunities and look at transitional services. So that's how we increase our visibility in schools is getting out there and meeting with them. And not land locking direct staff into saying your office ‑‑ your desk is where you need to be 24/7. There has to be a balance between being able to be out in the community and being in the office to work.

Some places don't even have an office. It's always out in the community. You have to have a place where still where they can come to the place whether it's a library. So part of our summer program we had one day where last year where we met at a library for the youth in that community and we held a summer program there.

So again I think I already talked about this, but asking what their interest is and peer support classes are led by board members and consumers. I'm hearing the Voices Network is led by one of our board members and a faith based meet and it's led by some of our consumers who were interested in that. It is an all-around thing. We have veterans group that was started by consumers. We have a respect institute that's led by board members and consumers and again the Us Blind Girls, it was a staff member that was participating outside of the organization in this and then it led to them coming here because she was interested in hosting the workshop. It was on Saturdays because she had adjust her schedule to do it. And it's been very successful. Probably 40 people show up every fourth Saturday here to do Us Blind Girls.

So I talked about the different technology and it's really important to stop and think what kind of technology there is available in your area. We use Zoom technology. No, if you go to Zoom Technology and they have this Zoom room you can buy and you are like there is no way you can afford this. You don't have to do that. We bought a TV that sits in our conference room and in our other room and we do the single person rate which is like $14.99 a month. Now there is a business rate that you can pay and you can have two different rooms and stuff. We just use the single rate one which is cheaper. And we bought a web cam. A good web cam. We use a mic for every single class we hold regardless of what somebody says, well, I can hear just fine. It doesn't matter. We don't ask. We just use a mic because it makes better for whoever happens to be in the room. That's the technology that helps. It also allows some recordings so if somebody missed a class they can watch it. One thing that I do say is that we use this a sign‑in sheet and we have people sign in and then we ask people who is on blind and sign them in. If they don't want to identify we boot them off. One of that is that one reason for that is because we hold different groups that may not feel safe if they can't identify who is on the line. So the LGBTQI AP group if they ‑‑ if the individuals don't identify, then we boot them off. And then the youth classes. So when we are having the youth summer classes, by the way, they are four and a half hours here, but they can also join in Zoom technology. They may not have the whole overall feeling of the community, but they do get to participate and it is mandatory they have a web cam. So we ensure they have a webcam and a community so they ‑‑ computer and they can participate at least in the visual sense.

And then ‑‑ and it doesn't matter if they are blind and you are blind ‑‑ they are blind or you are blind, it's the interaction we are trying to get people into. And Zoom technology that you can see here has the captioning ability which is really important. Individuals need captioning then we make sure that we have a captioner available for that. And so we list out and we require individuals to let us know in advance if any accessibility features are needed so we can try to meet that.

The access interpreting that allows on demand interpreting on schedule and interpreting. This was ‑‑ some kind ‑‑ I like the fact that somebody can be here in person interpreting. But at the same time I really see the benefit of having on demand access interpreting. We had a consumer that came in that needed ‑‑ that used ASL. And the first interpreter came on to do some sign language and they weren't connecting. And I'm not familiar enough with the different types of ASL, but his was learned mostly through home and not taught through a school. And so access interpreting was able to switch up and he was better able to identify with that ‑‑ a different interpreter. So that whole communication led to a lot of different things. What's nice about that is that it can be accessed on the computer, the phone, the iPad, all staff have separate code so they can log in. If it's billable for certain things, we can bill for the minutes because we can log in to who the consumer was and trackable for us to be able to figure out how much the accessibility we are utilizing and sharing and what we need to do. And then in the use of the land line for a variety of languages, this is one example, the language line.com. There are different other ones that we utilize, too. You can Google it and it's really easy. I know they have the Google that you can do that.

And then we use peer supporters. I talked about the three day training that we provide for peer support. Georgia did a project with Georgia project with the mental health peer support group and so we ‑‑ not Georgia, disABILITY LINK, we ended up becoming the only agency that can certify peer supporters cross disabilities. So we host a curriculum here and then we go out into other organizations and we charge a fee and stuff like that. But we use these trained peer supporters to pick up where we lack so if somebody in the Jewish community, we have different peer supporters that relate to the Jewish community and either they are volunteers and some are contract. Most of them are volunteers to be honest, and we utilize those volunteers to go out and provide the outreach for us.

One example of that was we were contacted by a nursing home where the consumer had wanted to go home but the social worker didn't think the family's interpreting was providing accurate information. And then the family members themselves were really afraid of sending their family member home or letting them go home because they weren't understanding what the social worker was talking about. And when the nursing home contacted us, we asked them to use language line and they didn't. When they went in to the nursing home, our staff member went into the nursing home, they came back and they said, hey, you know, we had another staff member, I think that this consumer speaks the language which is ‑‑ and I'm probably going to kill this pronunciation, the Patois which is Creole language with West Indian influences. And so that individual, that specialist went out and it was a great connection and was able to provide the family supports and so consumer went home with the supports and it has been over two years now and closer to three years. But it's using your staff, it's natural selection, the more welcoming you are, it all starts back in the back the more welcoming you are as far as your center, the more welcoming other communities come in, the more welcoming people apply come in so it's just really taking a look and making sure your staff, your board and everything mixes with the population you actually serve and sometimes that's uncomfortable because you may be the only like Liz said, the only African‑American or my case I might be the only Caucasian working at the center. So it's really thinking about the diversity in there.

So again, we encourage staff to bring forth ideas and address individual's needs and goals they are passionate about. We have a group called voices which is a singing group where individuals get together and they sing at our annual gala. We had consumers sing that were out from the voices. We had voices is everything autistic ‑‑ whatever your voice may be. Whether it's playing a musical instrument, reading a poem, poetry, whatever, so it's really an awesome opportunity to bring out that art in the world of disabilities. Encourage board members and consumers so our board members are provided a training before they can even apply to be a board member. And that way that understanding of what it means to be a board member. And I hear a lot of people ‑‑ I can barely even get a board member to come or I can't even hardly recruit people. The more things that you have and the more invite you have, then it seems like we have a slate where we have to deny people where as we used to be begging for people to be on the board. And so allowing that and then expecting your board members to be part is really important. And we invited consumers in for our planning group. Even in our strategic plan we took two staff members, two board members, two community members, two consumer members and that's how we built our strategic plan. So nobody is left out. We send an overall survey for everybody who wanted to participate but our planning group included those essential people so it wasn't ‑‑ nobody was left out at looking at different things.

Collaboration with different groups. I kind of already talked about but Black Lives Matters. The NAACP, we looked at the Latino, Korean, Muslim and Jewish. You name it. We reached out to those communities. LGBTQIAP. National federation of the blind, Georgia federation of the blind. Us Blind Girls. Domestic support groups. The City of Clarkston again because it's one of the most diverse. The ref ye population. I think the really important thing to do to remember is that you have to make sure that your image isn't a medical model. That you don't fall down that rabbit hole. That we are a business, but at some point you have to remember what we are here for to begin with the five core services. You won't meet when you come through our door we don't wear a suit and we don't wear a tie. Some centers do. That to us is a barrier because many of our consumers cannot afford a suit and a tie. We dress appropriately for work, but we don't overdress to create that barrier. So individuals feel like they are actually talking to a person rather than a suit. So that's really important with the collaborations of the different groups.

So when I was talking about the ‘Us Protecting Us Group,’ it ended up being because it is a peer led group but consumer identified with it. The group began over an interest in the Anthony Hills case in Atlanta and his Fiancée wanting to be part of the group. She also had a disability. And Anthony Hills had a disability and then that group gathered together initially to address the issues that were revolving around that case and then police brutality and then with disabilities overall and then education and peer support. So they are a continual, the focus want Anthony Hill's case and the focus is how can we get the police involving in understanding, educating and then maybe it's not the police but the community. So you let that peer led group actually develop and organize. That's an example of making the connections. Then utilizing the natural collections out of there with the NAACP, the Black Lives Matters, and inviting the community who are interest. And staff who want to come to that.

Again, hiring staff reflective of the community ended up being more of a natural selection after you start making your front door welcoming. It makes it welcoming. And then individuals start wanting to work here. Recruiting a board reflective of the community. We use a community assessment looking at where we were, what we are doing and where we need to go. Creating partnerships and passion from staff. I always say, you know, you are going to live here. At least eight hours of your day. If you are full time, which is half of your life. You got to enjoy what you are doing. If you don't, it definitely is reflective when you are providing a service. So have that passion ‑‑ how does that passion look? And have staff take ownership of their program. They wanted the workshop and now they are doing it. And so how do you create that? And empowering the staff to bring forth ideas and develop the perspective and using those workshop proposals make them think through and making individuals through what this would look like and whether it is a consumer oar a staff or a board member. That really helps say, okay, maybe it falls under this or, yes, I'm willing to make this commitment. That's been really key to us.

And then we support staff as well as through training. So we have weekly trainings for an hour long. We open it up to zoom and board members can join in on that training and what we do to cross train is the staff member signs up. We have a list and a staff member signs up to talk about an aspect of their job that they want to share with the rest of them what that process is. And that also gives an insight to the board members to understand what we do here at the center. All of our new employees go through our peer support training. Board training is required before being a member. And again I can't emphasize staff are empowered to bring ideas forth. It also required changing a policies to reflect diversity. That's in your bylaws and your different policies just so you don't leave out that aspect. So you do have to take a look at your policies and procedures.

>> Hi, Kim. This is Judith. This has been absolutely great information. But we are getting very, very close to the end of our time.

>> Okay.

>> So we do have a couple of questions real quickly. One is several people were interested in whether they could access your curriculum that you mentioned, the curriculum that you use in the schools. Is that something you could share or would be willing to talk to folks about?

>> I would definitely willing to talk to people about it. We try to keep our curriculum. But I can tell you this much, if we are ‑‑ the workshop with April, we will wait and see and parts of our curriculum will be shared there but we ‑‑ we do believe in sharing information with independent living centers so that's definitely something that you could contact us about.

>> Great. Okay. And I see that we have another question from Mitch. He says, often we will schedule an event for consumers and maybe a voters rights training or something and people don't come. We try to schedule activities in the community and again it can be frustrating to get people to come and attend. We talk about the sense of apathy that exists in the disabled community. What advice can you share about dealing with this issue?

>> That is really hard to get people to come. So you have to look at different ways. We utilize volunteers and I can tell you we had a zero volunteer program going on here when I first started and we have at least 14 volunteers every single week that come on a regular basis and they call consumers to remind them to invite them out to different events. We do voter drives. We try to collaborate and get donations of food. Food always brings people to places or little giveaway prizes. And we look at local vendors around that will donate things for us to be able to do that. We might give ‑‑ for instance, we have Kroger here and we go there and we ask them for $25 gift cards and then we advertise that the first 20 people get a gift card and they will get here. You have to be creative in how you will get them to begin with there. And even if one person shows up, it's consistency that really helps. You have to ‑‑ if you say you will do it, just keep doing it. And people will start showing up.

>> We have a little bit more time. There is another question. How did you get in the school to be a part of the transition fair? How were you able to initially connect with them and communicate in all of the languages in the schools?

>> So depending on what languages, Spanish is here and we actually have Spanish speaking staff. How we ended up getting into the different schools was the staff members called and asked to speak to the school counselors first there. And then they also asked to speak to the disability counselors or the disability teachers that were available. It was just ‑‑ and sending the information out.

>> So one more quick comment. We have just a little bit more time. Transportation seems to be an issue in rural areas. Can you quickly address that?

>> Right. So we have a transportation issues no matter where you are at. Some of my staff take two and a half hours to get to work. So that's why we use Zoom because transportation is an issue in getting to and from things. So using that. And then going into the community that's right around that area. And hosting an event in that area whether it's at a library or another person's office, dental office, medical office. Anywhere you can get in and fit in and asking for that free space for that event. We have done it at an apartment complex clubhouses.

>> Awesome. We will have to start wrapping it up. This has been absolutely wonderful, guys. We sure appreciate it. So directly following the webinar you will see an evaluation survey to complete on your screen. We do take your feedback seriously in order to improve our program so please fill that out. And I think that's it, guys. Thank you so much for joining today. Bye, everybody!