JOE MICHNER: The point of this portion of the training is to really give you a rapid fire of what may be possible.

We understand that many of you are at different places with your transition services.

Some are starting out, and some have programs and want to expand them.

The idea is not to overwhelm you but to give you the idea of what's possible.

Us and the five folks from Able will be running through programs really quickly.

We're not going to get too deep into the programs.

We're going to talk about funding and get into it deeper tomorrow.

We want to give you the overview and maybe inspire you a little bit with all of the things we have going on.

We understand that many of you are at different places with your transition services.

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We want to give you the overview and maybe inspire you a little bit with all of the things we have going on.

We want to have you keep in mind some things during this portion of the training, one being that all of our transition programming and all of your transition programming stems out of your core services.

So if you're doing things in addition to your core services, supplementing with other funding, your core services are at the root of everything you do, right?

And all transition programming develops differently for every CIL.

We have spoken to CILs from across the country so Kimberly, Charlie, everybody develops something uniquely and differently.

With that said, I'll turn it over to Seth and he'll tell you about who we are.

SETH HODEREWSKI: We are from the great state of Pennsylvania, about an hour north of Philly.

You guys from Philly?

Rochester?

There was someone here from Philly.

That's all right.

But yeah, we cover two counties, Lehigh and nearby county.

We branch off into other areas of the state for a number of other services that we do.

And one of the big things that we saw with our CIL as we've gotten into this transition related work is, you know, the significant growth that we've had with, by doing our transition services.

We are what's considered a state-funded CIL, so we are a line item in the governor's budget, and that budget has gone, that line item has gone down over the years.

So we've had to be very creative in the way we've tried to find more funding when it comes to different services, especially when it comes to transition and employment services and that type of thing.

Our overall budget is about $3 million.

Our transition and employment, at this point, is about 1.6, a little bit over half, which is just incredible.

We've had significant staff growth in that time, too.

When I started about eight years ago, I was maybe 12, 13 staff there.

We're up well over 65 at this point.

So we have had incredible growth quickly.

JOE MISCHNER: Some of you made the comment about starting slow.

We did not do that and that's hurt us.

Learn from us.

We've actually grown too fast.

We're one of 18 CILs in Pennsylvania.

And the cool thing about Lehigh Valley, we have both urban, the out-of-town area and very rural areas.

We can speak to a lot of the challenges that many of you are facing in your areas.

We're going to go fast.

We'll save questions and answers until the end of the session here.

This first slide you see, it's all about our core services.

Like we said, everything stems out of the core services.

As Seth mentioned and I'm sure as is the case for all of you, core service dollars only go so far.

How are you going to serve more youth?

How will you connect to the schools more intensively and to start working with youth at a younger age?

And so a lot of, other than this slide, a lot of the programs we're going to talk about are supplemented or completely funded by alternate funding services outside of our core services.

But again, those core services are tried and true through everything we do I'd say especially the core services, when we go out and promote, those are the first things that we talk about.

They are the underlying theme for everything that we do in all of our services in the Lehigh Valley CIL.

It comes back to the thing of needing to know everything out there.

It takes a village, in many cases, to get a young adult and help them get to where they want to be.

So knowing everything that's out there and all the options, the resources, the information is so very important.

JOE MISCHNER: So it begins.

SETH HODEREWSKI: This is where it began for us.

Initially we started, work out of our fan group, Future Advocates Now, and we did a lot of things with peer support group in the past that led us to a whole bunch of other thinkings.

We got calls in the fall from the young adults and parents saying my young adult is home.

Now what do I do? They're done with school, where do I go next? So in 2008, we were fortunate enough to get a grant from the PA Developmental Disabilities Council.

I'm sure every state has a DDC.

They're a great source for funding and have very similar thinkings to a CIL, which is really cool.

But what we were able to do with that was to begin a young adult group that we called our S2L group.

Along with that, a summer program that we called the Real World Lehigh Valley.

We were grant funded for a number of years.

Working with 25 young adults, 14-21 on all kinds of transition-related skills.

In that first year, I always say that I was, it was pretty much just me.

It was me in a room and our executive director working on transition-related activities.

From there it just blew up and took things to another level.

You'll hear us talk a lot over the next couple days about networking and relationship building and how important that is when you're doing all of this kind of thing.

That first year was spent a lot on developing the network piece.

JOE MISCHNER: There's a lot of funding sources out there that you can potentially investigate and research, but obviously the ideal is always to start a program with the grant funding to back you up to get you that sustainability, and that's what this was all about.

This program started with 25 young adults.

Now at any given time, we're serving about 400 active young adults in our programs.

So eight years ago.

SETH HODEREWSKI: So just to get into a little more about what the S2L program is and the Real World program is, this group gets together a couple times a month and we do different types of activities based on what they want to do.

We consider that to be youth-led and youth-driven.

This is their program and the things that they want to do.

They set the goals at the beginning of the year as far as what they want to do for the social piece.

So do they want to have a Halloween party? Do they want to see the Phillies play? Do they want to, where are they at? Do they want to get Japanese food? What do they want to do socially? What do they want to do for advocacy? Advocacy is another thing we like to do.

We will do some work with veterans in the next couple months.

Has anybody seen post-it wars? There were advertising agencies in New York City on opposite sides of the street from each other.

One did their giant windows in a bunch of different post-its and did really cool pictures.

One on the other side also did that.

There was one, they finally did one of dropping the mic or something like that.

We thought what a great idea.

How can we make that some sort of advocacy? So if people have, people know the original accessible symbol on all the parking spaces.

And I'm sure many people have seen the new international symbol of accessibility.

We did that in our windows at the CIL.

The original one, we had two arrows and the new symbol.

With all the post-it notes, it looked awesome.

It was on social media and got picked up.

It was a lot of fun.

Those kind of things, we're always trying to do the fun and unique type of things.

We do a lot of fund raising, get out in the community, help do outreach.

We try to incorporate as much into that group work as possible.

And they're looking at team building, communication, all of those skills that you need to be able to eventually work with someone.

No matter what you do, you need to be able to work with people.

So, it's a really tight-knit group.

They get along well and do a lot of great work.

And it's a lot of fun.

We tend to meet on Friday nights.

When do young adults want to meet? Usually Friday nights, right? Evenings, weekends, all that kind of stuff.

When are young adults free? That's typically what we do.

JOE MISCHNER: We've gotten questions, how do you run a youth program without working nights and weekends.

The answer is, you don't.

[ Laughter ] SETH HODEREWSKI: We've had meetings where people specifically ask that.

At the same time we're also doing our Real World Lehigh Valley.

Remember that TV show? Real World Dallas or New York City? We did our spin on that, and we did the Real World Lehigh Valley.

It had similar elements to the S2L group.

It was a very intensive six-week program where the young adults are coming together with a real focus on independent living skills and employment type skills.

That program, like I said, has developed over the past few years to the point now where our local offices are funding that through WIOA moneys.

We would do different and creative things around how to get a job, and how to keep a job, right down to interview fashion shows and things like top chef competitions, brown bag edition.

What would you take for lunch? Not a steak, probably a sandwich or a salad.

That type of thing.

We would try to do these things in a creative and fun way.

That program has grown and developed to the point now where this year we're going to be hosting our summer program out of our local theme park.

People have heard of Dorney Park.

We've developed a relationship with them.

They are maybe what? Two miles from our office, which is really awesome.

We're going to be hosting, they're going to be giving us space to do curriculum and letting us go on site to try different types of jobs and work experiences and job shadowing, that type of thing.

So that has been a real incredible opportunity for us.

And we're just thrilled about that.

JOE MISCHNER: We've already burned through 15 minutes of our 30, so we're really going to start going rapid fire at this point.

We're going to jump into the career path program.

Out of the success of the S2 will and RWLV, we already had a pretty good talking relationship with our local VR office, our Voc Rehab.

They saw our success.

And this year they are starting to fund young adults to come to that program.

But we were also looking around the Lehigh Valley.

I wasn't there yet, so I wasn't looking anywhere yet.

I was looking for a job.

Seth and Amy were looking at other providers that were providing services as providers for Voc Rehab, specifically job coaching.

And they said boy, wouldn't it be great if somebody did that job coaching thing with the consumer control aspect to it? And that's where the career path program came in.

So Voc Rehab was interested in us in being a provider because they saw what we were doing through the S2L and Real World program.

They brought me on and we started the career path program which is a supported program focused on young adults 18-25 who are out of high school.

We were able to add some really unique elements to it.

One was an eight-weeks training where they took part in work essential skills training, preparing for interviews.

That type of stuff.

We called it like a mini boot camp.

Expectations in school are very different from real world employment.

So we were focused on learning the skills.

Tim, you're sick today.

Who's going to call in and tell your boss that you're sick.

It's not mom or dad that maybe did that for you while you were in school.

Now it's on you.

And then we're doing the traditional things like community-based work assessment with a CIL approach.

We're not telling people where to go to look for a job.

We're exploring their interests, those kind of things.

Lo and behold, the IL philosophy works.

So this program started with 25 young adults.

This is now our biggest transition and employment program and is about 240 active participants in this program and a very successful program.

VR agreed to allow us to do person-centered planning through this program, instead of just relying on their planning methods.

We actually get to do person-centered planning, the actual models like maps and paths and things like that.

It's now a fee-for-service program.

We had six months of grant funding to start it.

We have individual rates for all of these services and things like that.

Go ahead.

And then out of that program, young adults and their parents and schools started to pay attention to us and said, hey, why don't you start providing these services for students that are in school more intensively, one-on-one.

And that's where our LIFE program was born.

This program is funded by the schools, and they send students to us to work on things whether they're independent living skills, studying for a driver's permit, doing things on career paths like exploring jobs or potentially seeking a job.

In this case our biggest customer is like cyber schools because they can't do anything hands-on.

They are sending students to us.

Some students come a couple hours a week depending on what their goals are.

Some students come every day all day, it's their entire school day all funded by schools.

Rapid fire.

I'm ready.

Then we got hooked up with project SEARCH.

It is a national program that is supposed to take a unique and customized look at young adults and what their options are for work out of high school.

So we got hooked up with that.

We became a provider for project SEARCH.

That's where students in school, typically their last year, are going to an actual work site whether it be a hospital and things like that, and doing jobs throughout the day.

That led to the vocational independent program where we partnered with school districts now.

This is where it gets cool and we talk about systems change.

We have one of our staff at one of these sites with two school staff and we're working with students to prepare them for jobs after graduation.

The cool thing is our staff really get to influence the school staff and kind of change the way they're looking at things.

School staff, not here to knock them.

They're trying really hard but they're focused on what? Graduation.

Okay? So we're really working to prepare the young adults for that transition to that adult life after school, and we're helping them start to kind of refocus what their goals are when they're working for students.

That's pretty awesome.

This is actually the first moneys that were tagged from the new WIOA pre-employment transition services, which we'll talk about in a minute.

This is one of the first programs that started to use some of the new WIOA funds.

A long time ago, we set out the career paths, awesome.

Can we do a college path? There's not a lot of funding for students who seek post-secondary education.

Our local community college, we happened to have a really good connection with them.

And the development disabilities council helped us start the SEED program.

We were working with about 20 students every day facilitating a structured study lounge to help the students achieve their post-secondary goals.

Very cool.

Again, we'll talk about funding tomorrow.

I know there's probably lots of questions.

And then, now all this WIOA stuff comes rolling out, and I just want to clarify something.

So you know, earlier this morning we talked about core services and our new obligations under the core services.

This stuff is contracted with Voc Rehab, and they define youth transition differently, okay? So should I run out of the room after I say this, because I'm scared.

Okay.

So under VR, they are providing youth transition services to young adults ages 14-21 with an IEP or 504 who are in school, okay.

I'm safe.

Nobody through anything.

This is us contracted with VR to provide young adults with paid work experiences, job shadowing experiences, and also us going into school and doing group presentations on a lot of stuff that we do in our career path program.

Okay? Keep moving.

SETH HODEREWSKI: So then, based off of all of that, we just put in the letter of understanding yesterday to our local VR office to do things like another S2L group at our CIL and maybe some surrounding areas.

They're going to fund the Real World Lehigh Valley summer program.

They're going to look at skills training, independent community travel planning and pay for person-centered planning.

JOE MISCHNER: I forgot to mention that earlier.

We have schools now taking person-centered plans and incorporating them into IEPs.

How cool is that? The student's voice is in their IEP.

Pretty exciting.

SETH HODEREWSKI: We don't even know what to expect out of that.

We expect to see a ton more young adults coming through with the different groups and opportunities there.

And then within the last, we're coming up on our second year here, we were really excited to get another innovation and expansion grant from OVR from what we call our Transition Experience Program, and this is one that we're partnering with OVR and Cedar Crest College where we have students on campus five days a weeks for nine weeks.

First week we're looking at post-secondary options.

Maybe sitting in on a class, whole nine yards.

And then the last six weeks around employment.

And there's a curriculum for both of these and the young adults going through, both of the curriculum, and getting experiences on campus, work experiences, job shadow experiences.

We do TEP talks where students that are going to college at the college coming in and talking and mentoring our students as well.

And it's just phenomenal options for a young adult who maybe has the thought that maybe post-secondary is for me.

Or maybe employment is more for me.

So giving those tastes and experiences of what things are like that a young adult can draw from.

JOE MISCHNER: And not just college.

We're exploring training and certificate options.

We're going to other colleges outside of Cedar Crest College to see options and exploring them with students.

After the nine-week sessions, we have multiple nine-week sessions throughout the year.

We have staff who continue to work with the students after the nine weeks to pursue a job or start applying for post-secondary options.

We are pursuing the grant funding and looking to have it sustainable by the end of this year.

SETH HODEREWSKI: And then we were able to take it to a whole other level in a program that was funded by the developmental disabilities council in Pennsylvania looking at leadership in schools.

So we initially did some research and talked to business leaders and community leaders about what does a young adult, whether you have a disability or not what do you need to know to come into the work force? We used all of that information as a basis to create an entire website.

If you want to check it out, there are lessons plans for teachers that are standard and aligned to academics in Pennsylvania.

Videos, information, whole nine yards.

And we get around the state and we talk about leadership and promote leadership for all.

One of the really cool things that we have been able to do that has grown out of this is we've been working with a group called Pennsylvania youth leadership network, and they are a group that has really changed over the years.

They used to be more about disability and transition and helping young adults on the state-wide level there in Pennsylvania.

They have become more of an inclusive group.

And they, along with our Leadership in Schools project looked at different groups like 4H and other groups out there and looked at the different types of models to learn leadership.

And so we're in the process of developing affiliates around the state of Pennsylvania that can come together and work together and learn about youth leadership and be for all students.

So then, there's a whole ton of other little things that we've been able to do and develop over time, which has just been awesome from have you thought about life, which is a very interactive presentation that we have taken to schools that was meant to recruit students, to transition options teams to state leadership teams to advisory boards to working with United Way, to PYLN, to, you name it, we've really done a lot in Pennsylvania.

It even went to, you know, being what created our supports coordination programming at our CIL, too.

They saw what we were doing and especially with the autism way, it took us a whole bunch of other different type of places.

And working with other groups, transition advocacy.

#Iwanttowork, that was a very successful campaign.

Different clubs and groups and volunteers and just all over the place.

JOE MISCHNER: How you doing? Okay? All right, cool with all that said, we're going to get more into the funding and program partnership stuff and how we developed all of this stuff tomorrow, but we're going to overwhelm you some more and turn it over to Charlie and Kimberly to give you a run down on all the awesome things they are doing out in Able.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: All right.

How are y'all feeling? Overwhelmed? All right.

Good, good, good.

My name is Kimberly Tissot, and I am the executive director over in South Carolina.

CHARLIE WALTERS: How are y'all feeling? Lunch lull? Nap time? My name's Charlie Walters.

It's a pleasure to meet y'all.

I'm director of transition programs at ABLE, South Carolina.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: First I'm going to tell you about our center.

We serve 23 counties, but we do serve a lot of, we do provide a lot of services outside of our designated counties.

So we, 23 counties in our state is half of our state.

And we have a lot of our youth programs that are actually statewide.

So we'll explain those in a little bit.

We focus on one-on-one.

And in South Carolina, if you're not familiar, we are a very bible belt state.

We want to take care of people with disabilities, so our organization has taken it upon ourselves, we're going to change the culture in South Carolina.

That is something that we're focusing on in our state.

We have 43 staff members and over 30 funding streams.

This is not where we started.

Seven years ago, we had one funding stream and we had seven staff members.

So talking about very past-paced growth, it can absolutely happen, and it's not that difficult.

It just takes a lot of passion and go getting attitudes.

So thank you.

And before we get started into the services, I want to let you all know about ABLE, South Carolina's culture.

We live by our values.

We have our values posted throughout our offices.

We have it posted in individual offices.

This is something that drives our decision making within our organization.

The first value that you'll see up there is empowerment.

We do not reach goals for our consumers.

We teach our consumers how to do for themselves.

That is uncommon a lot of times for people with disabilities.

We have had decisions made about us, for us, people have done things for us.

So a lot of times when consumers come to us for the first time, this is a whole new concept and they're loving it.

Inclusion.

We advocate for individuals with disabilities to be included in integrated environments in classrooms, employment, housing, leadership roles, and in discussions that impact their lives.

See the word classroom? We make sure that everything our organization does impacts all ages.

Independent, we believe that individuals with disabilities should have the right to control their own lives and make decisions about what's best for them.

We believe every individual can be independent.

That last sentence is something that really makes us stand out in our state.

A lot of the other organizations, they say the word "independent," but they don't really know what that means, and they're not promoting it.

Equality, we advocate for equal rights and access, not special treatment.

We do not want special treatment.

And the disability pride, we make sure this is ingrained in all of our consumers.

We want them to be proud of who they are and teach them that disability is not a bad thing.

I wanted to just to go over these values because you'll see these throughout our services, and we do not make, we do not create any programs unless they fit our values.

So you will see on here, and I'll explain this.

From 2013 to 2016, we have had a considerable jump in the amount of young adults that we provide services for in 2013, we served 135 individuals between the ages of 5-24, which made up about 21% of the consumers that were served.

Remember, this is one-on-one services, and this is the data that was reported on our 704 report.

In 2014, we had 157, which was 26%, and you see that jump quickly from 2014 and 2015.

2015 we served 713 consumers between the ages of 5-24, and that was 59% of our consumer base are youth.

And then in 2016, we did a little slight decrease.

Not sure what happened there, but we served 696 consumers between the ages, which made up 56% of consumers.

So you see we are very youth-focused.

CHARLIE WALTERS: Okay.

So if you have electronic access to these power points, you'll get captioning for the images.

The reason we included logos, and I'll do my best to try to keep up with describing those as we go.

The reason we included the logos is because marketing is important to us.

The images and face that the programs have in the community is important.

The recognition that we have as a center, as experts in our field is important.

My background is in special education, which I hesitate to say it out loud.

But the reason I say it is because it's important.

We get language about transition.

It's different from Title I to Title VII.

There's a lot of conflict.

In special education, regardless of how you feel about the field, transition has been mandated since 1990.

We have been talking about it and collecting research, and we have decades of research about what separates youth with disabilities who are successful after high school from those who are not so successful after high school.

It's important to be on the cusp of that expertise, the way we market our programs.

We speak a language that's in line with IL and also in line with decades of research on best practice and transition.

Quickly, the logo is orange block letters with a chat bubble inside the Q spelling equip.

It's for and by young adults and parallels one of the programs that you heard about from Lehigh Valley.

It's for young adults 13 to 28.

Put aside the regs for a second.

The programs come first, right? So we end up serving youth who fall within the regs as transition-aged youth.

We speak about transition in youth, we're talking about all ages.

In South Carolina, transition is mandated in the state to start at 13, so one year earlier than mandated federally.

This is all about peer to peer skill building, from self-advocacy to communication to goal setting and attainment.

There's a bunch of different parts.

Last year the equip program reached over 1,000 people.

So it's comprised at the core of peer support, youth with disabilities supporting other youth with disabilities and building on natural skills and assets within those groups.

So regional and monthly hang-outs are occurring all the time.

So we have six different regional hang-outs and one online hang-out this is important for rural communities.

A lot of South Carolina is very rural and transportation is always an issue.

Having an online component that parallels what we're doing in person is very important.

There's a bunch of different entry points.

We find young adults off the street that have more leadership skill than I do, and we find young adults that are just starting off in the process.

So multiple access points to the program is very important.

One of them is the summer series.

One is the hangouts and the other is a summer series, which is a six-week intensive leadership program in the summer in two different locations in the state during the summer.

They are full single days six weeks in a row.

And so it totals about 25, 28 hours of leadership development over the summer.

Professional development and mentorship.

What we do as a program in equip is we have opportunities for those who want to further develop their leadership skills to come on board as paid staff.

So we have 15 equip leaders who are actually at our center as paid staff that are responsible for all the goings on of the program.

So the professional development and mentorship of those leaders, that's the crux of it.

Those leaders mentoring other youth that come into the program.

And so we, as a staff of old folks, we're committed to that professional development and making sure that they get mentorship.

That they're enculturated properly so they're speaking the language that we have been speaking for decades.

The equip leaders do trainings for families, professionals, and other youth.

Self-determination and self-advocacy, the skills that we know are so important to develop in young adults, they mean nothing if we're not giving them meaningful opportunities to practice the skills.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: This is a newer program for us.

This is our second year running it.

It is a four-day, three-night leadership experience where it's an overnight experience at a college.

Overnight experiences can be very fun, by the way, with youth.

We have a saying in our organization, no YLF babies.

We make sure we separate the males and females.

It's all good.

All good.

So what we do is we collaborate with multiple agencies.

This is how you get people to apply for YLF.

You have partnerships.

We're going to keep saying partnerships and collaboration, because that is so important to growing programs and your organization.

We collaborate, I think, with about 15 stakeholders with this group.

This year we recently recruited and had applications.

We were worried about getting 25 applications in, but we ended up getting 62.

So we had a very hard decision to make with selecting only 25 delegates.

We also formed a YLF alumni association.

This is where the delegates come after the actual overnight experience, and they talk about, they plan the next YLF.

And they plan the activities, the speakers, and they also staff the YLF.

It's a program that is led and run by young adults with disabilities.

We also connect them with legislators.

Last year we took transit to the state house and they got to speak with two legislators from our General Assembly and talk about how laws are made and the importance of youth involvement when making decisions, when legislators are making decisions about disability services within our state.

We also have speakers from around the U.S.

come in that have disabilities.

We feel that whole mentorship within YLF is so very important.

I know that when I was younger, meeting somebody with a disability who was successful in transition meant the absolute world to me.

So that's what we are passing down with YLF.

And then the history of YLF was quite interesting.

It used to be run by a parent organization.

We know sometimes that parents can actually be the barrier to transition, and they were the barrier of YLF.

They were giving folks these rocks, and they were breaking them up and saying oh, you're like a rock.

You're ugly on the outside but pretty on the inside.

We're like oh, we've got to get this program.

So we ended up having youth share their experience of how that was detrimental to their image and we actually ended up getting the funding for that program later on.

This is our second year doing it and it has been very successful so far.

CHARLIE WALTERS: So as we're talking about this training, we were meeting with regular phone calls to put the training together and I had a limited role in that, Kimberly was at the forefront of that conversation.

I spent months excited about the prospect of coming to be with you guys for the simple reason that there is no other organization better situated to support youth in transition than the centers for independent living.

Bar none.

Who knows what I mean when I say best practice in transition? Who are my research geeks that don't mind reading journal articles in their spare time about effective practice? When you look at it, it's a short list of things that we know are highly correlated with success after high school.

60% of that list are things that are in the list.

Person-centered planning, self-determination skills and the essence of consumer control.

Talking about independent living skills.

All the things that we eat and breathe and sleep daily as CILs, these are the things that are at the core of best practices.

So what I hope y'all will leave here with after a few days with us is the confidence that there is nobody in your community better situated as a partner and as a collaborator in transition to improve post-school outcomes.

So one of the ways that we capitalize on that as a center is we were the first center to start a transition conference in the state.

This idea has been around forever.

People are still desperate, other professionals are still desperate for resources.

Other families are still desperate for resources.

Every time you get a new generation of transition-aged youth in, there's a huge learning curve for families and the young adults themselves.

We started two conferences.

One of them, empowering the future.

The logos are at the bottom.

Orange block letters with blue lines going out the side that spell out the names.

Empowering a future is a one day professional conference where we target any professional working with youth in transition.

I'm glad to be in a room of like-minded people because I can speak freely.

But we take people that we know as a profession, you know, from rehab counselors to special educators, people that we know their profession rests solely on deficits-based thinking, and we just blow their mind for a whole day with nothing but strengths based approach to working with youth.

They don't know that we're completely brain washing them but at the end of the day, a lot of them have drunk the Kool-Aid, and that's the whole point.

The other is mapping your future, and that's for families.

We tell them, somewhat explicitly sometimes, we know your expectations are lower than they should be coming into the one-day conference.

The entire point is getting them to raise the bar on what they think is possible.

Both young adults, for themselves, and families, what their families think is possible.

That's a completely free conference.

There was nothing else going on like this in transition in the state.

Look to your state.

Likely there's a need for something like this.

Okay.

So capable and ready.

This is a really fun conversation because the time is just so ripe for transition everything.

So 15% of Voc Rehab's budget is going to pre-employment transition services.

I was going to ask for a raise of hands on who works well with VR services.

It varies, right? We were talking with Seth and Joe, and South Carolina is completely different than Pennsylvania.

And one of the areas that's completely different is in our relationship with our state vocational rehabilitation department.

We have a really good relationship with the South Carolina commission for the blind.

That's the second arm of VR to serve people with visual disabilities in the state.

A really, really good relationship with them.

We work closely with VR.

VR doesn't contract out for anything.

They keep every dollar they get internally.

They spend it all on their own staff.

Commission for the blind is happy to contract out, and one of the areas that they're really happy to contract out was for meeting this obligation to spend 15% of their budget on pre-employment transition services.

We have no idea what self-advocacy is.

Help.

The reason it worked for commission for the blind to contract out is because for pre-employment transition services as Seth and Joe were talking about, we're talking about people who are potentially eligible for VR.

It's the one in five as opposed to just the students receiving special education.

Okay.

So capable and ready is about pre-employment transition services in the school.

Self-advocacy to work readiness and providing an avenue for youth to work with us one-on-one for more intensive support as well.

Thank you.

Okay.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: And now the South Carolina employment first initiative.

This is something that we're very, very proud of.

A couple of, I guess a little bit over a year ago, not even a year ago, actually, ACL put out a grant.

We saw it two weeks before it was due and we're like this is a great idea.

Let's go ahead and apply for this.

I'm going to talk about partnership again.

If we did not have relationships with a number of other organizations, we would not have had this grant.

We were the only nonprofit that has ever been awarded this grant, and we were chosen out of one in six states.

So we are representing South Carolina.

So only one nonprofit, and that nonprofit is a center for independent living.

Yay! So with this grant, it was actually a requirement that we had a memorandum of agreement with vocational rehabilitation, South Carolina department of education, South Carolina disabilities and special needs vocational rehabilitation, and our university center of excellence and developmental disabilities.

Before we even started to write the grant and submit it, we had to start the conversation with these groups and talk about, look, we're wanting to apply for this grant.

We need you all on board.

It took the full two weeks to get everyone on board with getting this big memorandum of agreement but we ended up having ten partners within the grant application, which really contributed to us getting this grant.

It is a five-year grant, and we'll talk more about the funding tomorrow.

Do you want to jump into the goals? CHARLIE WALTERS: So the goals are pretty straightforward, right? So we're bringing employment first to South Carolina, who is really, really far behind in the game in employment.

We're still 11,000 or so served in shelter workshops in the state at this time.

And so there are three main goals for the employment first initiative.

Draw your attention to the logo, a blue suitcase with a green boarder and written inside the briefcase is South Carolina employment first initiative.

The branding is really important.

Having a vision for what this was going to look like on the surface, the other side is important, too.

The roots of programming is so important.

But being able to convey that vision to a public audience and to other perspective partners is critical as well.

So with this project, we're aiming to, one, equip high school students and those recently exited from high school to enter competitive employment.

Who knows what the number one predictor of employment success is for students with disabilities? The number one predictor of employment success? Employment.

Right? If you work competitively in high school, you are four to five times more likely to work competitively after high school.

It's a no-brainer.

In South Carolina we have no idea statewide what kind of outcomes there are for competitive work experiences for students while still in high school.

This is a big part of that project is to change that and change the culture around what we think is possible for youth with disabilities.

So a lot of different parts of this project.

We're going to talk more about this, too, as we go on.

Please, as a reminder, use your post-it notes if you have questions.

I know this feels really braggy.

We don't want it to be braggy, but we want to start conversations.

As you get ideas about the pieces of this that you can maybe replicate or talk more about, write it down on the post-it notes so you don't lose the important thoughts.

The second goal is to establish cross system implementation of employment first principles.

We're talking policy alignment and training.

So our state department of disabilities and special needs trickles all of their services through local disabilities and special needs boards, so that's where all Medicaid waiver services are channeled through.

At the state level they put out an employment first director but local boards are still running sheltered workshops.

It's a bizarre case where people need to be trained.

Everyone at this point, I think a lot of people at this point, when I say employment first, they think that know what that means.

We probably don't.

We probably need training on really what that means.

We're talking equity in employment and financial outcomes with people with disabilities which means a thousand and one different things.

Next up with is so, part of this, the third goal is to conduct benefits trainings to dispel myths regarding working in benefits.

Kimberly is going to talk about how our work with benefits feeds into this and how it's part of this project as well.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Just a fun fact about the South Carolina employment first initiative, we have other goals for this program.

We have a plan to close down all of the sheltered workshops in South Carolina.

We're going to do it.

So within the five years that is our ultimate plan is to close those shops down, but we have to assist them with transitioning those consumer s into competitive employment.

We have a statewide campaign that we're going to be doing to change the way people think about individuals with disabilities and specially youth.

And we also have a pro bono lobbyist on our team, and we're working on getting employment first legislation in our state.

A lot of exciting things that we're able to do with the grants.

CHARLIE WALTERS: And youth voice is very important.

Youth are serving actively.

This is centered around the South Carolina disability employment coalition and youth are an integral part of what is coming out of this.

Their voice is at the table through all of this.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: And the next program we're doing is we collaborate with a lot with our parent training and information center.

Raise your hand if you know who your PTI is in your state.

About 5% or so? Yeah.

So this is very important to establish this relationship.

These are parents.

These are parents that think that they know a lot, so it can be very uncomfortable conversations.

But if you do it kindly, I think you can get very far.

With the, our state's PTI, a couple years ago, two years ago the grant came up to be competitive.

And there, our past PTI was not doing very well.

They were telling everybody to get guardianships and just a lot of issues within that organization and a lot of the stakeholders weren't working with them.

So we talked to another family-run organization, and they actually decided to apply for the grant and we assisted them with their grant application and also have that conversation.

Because PTIs are required to provide youth transition services.

Do we want, as a disability community, do we want parents providing youth a transition program? Absolutely not.

Since we are required to provide transition services, I sat down with their executive director, and we formulated a plan that we will provide all of that organization's youth transition programming.

And that is exactly what we do and that's exactly what we get paid for.

That organization has shifted their whole philosophy because of our organization.

They changed their mission.

They used to have the wording "special needs" in their session.

They have revamped their terminology and focus and really promoting independent living within their organization now.

We, within our contract that we have with Family Connections of South Carolina, we provide IL skills to all of the youth, and parents are coming in with children starting at 13.

We provide training to parents regarding disability rights and self-advocacy.

We facilitate a parent youth advisory council, which can sometimes get heated with youth and parents going back and forth.

But the parents are listening to these youth, for the first time in this organization.

We host a workshop with them called "Free to be Me," where families and youth come.

We separate the parents and the youth go into a different session, and we focus with the youth on self-advocacy skills and work with the parents on how to empower independent within your child and how to let go.

CHARLIE WALTERS: So at the parent advisory council, it's six youth and six parents and one of the parents in the first meeting said I think we need to create a resource for other parents with sons or daughters to help them cope with the diagnosis of disability.

One of the people on the council looked at the parent and said you know what? I like the idea.

But I think we should create something for parents so that they understand that disabilities are amazing and something to celebrate if their son or daughter was diagnosed.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: It was interesting.

They had a grieving session constantly, and they no longer do that.

You'll grieve for a little while, but let's get past the grieving and move over.

Disability is not a bad thing.

We also provide technical assistance for parents with disabilities.

Parenting is an IL skill.

You should be assisting people with the adoption process, with becoming a parent, whatever their needs are.

And the PTIs are actually required by their federal grant to teach parents with disabilities.

They are not equipped for that.

They do not know modified parenting techniques.

They do not know assistive technology that can be used to promote parenting.

So that is something that we now provide for the PTI, because we are the best organization to provide that service.

CHARLIE WALTERS: So school visits is a big one.

So I think it's right around, I don't know if we gave a number.

I don't want to lie.

It changes all the time, right? We have collaborative partnerships with school districts all over the state.

This is a big one.

We want access to youth who want to learn IL skills.

So developing those relationships with school districts is really critical, right? And so, you know, before Kimberly took over as executive director, we had a long history of just having, sending advocates into IEP meetings without knowing what they were walking into just to advocate.

That doesn't mean that they were doing it in a way that would benefit the skill building in the child that they were there to advocate for.

I'm happy to talk with anyone who'd like to chat more.

Our approach is we don't go to IEP meetings unless we're working on self-advocacy related skills with that young adult and our going to the meeting supports that skills.

There's circumstances where we'll go if it's really terrible stuff.

We don't hesitate to let people know when they need to get in line or they're doing something terrible.

We want to develop and maintain strong relationships with school districts so that we have access to serving students there.

So we know.

As I mentioned, this is where I really geek out and get excited.

We know what it takes to bridge the gap between success and not being successful, right? Like we know what those things are.

Who knows the correlation between student-led IEP meetings and success after high school? It's huge from reducing the risk of sexual exploitation in young men and women with disabilities to improving pay rates after high school.

Getting with that and being experts in that area so you can speak language that schools understand and you can provide those services is very important.

So one-on-one skill building, core services is a spring board.

We never get away from IL and our roots, and that one-on-one skill building and anything IL related is always at the forefront of what we're doing.

Okay.

Supported decision making.

We're running out of time, getting into the last couple of minutes.

Can I see a show of hands, who's familiar with supported decision making? KIMBERLY TISSOT: Sierra said we can go over.

CHARLIE WALTERS: Cool.

So I see five or six hands.

Who's familiar with guardianship? Another show of hands? More.

About 30, 35 hands went up for that one.

So supported decision making is becoming an internationally recognized alternative to guardianship.

In South Carolina, it's different state to state, but in South Carolina, probate courts rule in favor of families getting full guardianship, which is the most punitive civil rights stripping that you can do to an individual.

You take away their right to sign a marriage license, right? You take away all of their adult rights and privileges in a full guardianship and you transfer them to the guardian.

It's a mess.

We're awarding guardianships at a rate that's three to four times higher than it was 20 years ago.

As we know more and more about transition and what it takes to have successful adult live s for all people, we're awarding guardianships in rates that are astronomical.

This is ridiculous.

And so the supported decision making is a project that we have at our center that's all about changing this culture, right? Changing that conversation.

Who makes decisions, all of their decisions without support? We all make decisions with support.

Look, we all make decisions differently just because you can't make decisions in a vacuum without support does not mean that you are not capable of making good decisions.

So we're working to train professionals, families, young adults with disabilities especially, but also adults with disabilities on what implementing supported decision making in their life would look like, especially on the eve of a lot of them actively pursuing guardianship.

Okay? Can you tell I like that one a whole lot? It's my favorite.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: We are a sub-contractor for our states work incentive planning and assistant program.

So benefits counseling is essential.

They need to know what will happen to their benefits when they go into employment.

This is a crucial service that we provide.

We have individual, we have three full-time staff members on this program, but this is something that we go into the schools and talk to the teachers so that they can send their young adults to us to be able to provide this benefits counseling.

This is the key to transition a lot of times.

You don't know what will happen after you get to employment with Medicaid and stuff like that.

We provide comprehensive review from social security to show them how much they can actually make and keep their benefits or transition off of their benefits.

We also provide a program called the Community Leadership Academy.

This is something that all centers should be involved in because we're always wanted to promote, we always want to get more people in the community who have disabilities on boards, councils, committees, to be able to speak on behalf of individuals with disabilities and use that disability voice.

So we provide a pretty extensive six-week leadership training to young adults and adults on how to serve in a professional role in a leadership role on these boards and committees.

We teach them about Roberts Rules and professionalism.

We teach them how to use their voice to make change for the disability community.

CHARLIE WALTERS: Okay.

So professional development and technical assistance.

We're going to talk about this as a revenue, potential revenue source at your center.

This is important.

It all goes back to the idea of staying rooted in IL, staying rooted in core services, but becoming subject matter experts.

Kimberly and our assistant director recruited me out of graduate school.

As someone who was wanted more of what IL was doing, was not buying into the special education or the other disciplines that were looking to work with people with disabilities.

This is important.

I don't say that to talk about myself, as much as I like doing that.

Just to say that it's important.

It's an important part to have that subject matter expertise and not just make it up as you go along.

This only can serve to bolster your center in the programming and the funding that you can go after and the funding that you can have at your center.

We do a lot from the professional conference that I spoke of earlier to technical assistance.

Schools pay us to come in and do trainings on IEPs, supported decision making and more.

Providing consultation on accessibility, right? So doing ADA accessibility assessments on school grounds.

Schools pay for that kind of thing.

Serving on transition teams.

We have a state-wide transition alliance.

Becoming a voice on anything that is going on in your state pertaining to transition this is critical.

All of our staff members are required to do at least 18 hours annually of professional development.

We believe in being professionals, right? We believe in not stopping that learning process.

We get really, we have the, there's a risk of getting really insular in IL and what we know about transition is that it's inner-agency, right? It's cross discipline.

It's this really robust, messy undertaking, and the more we know, the more we become the subject matter experts in the area, the better we're going to end up supporting youth.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: And with the 18 hours of professional development, that's actually put into our strategic plan and measured annual during annual reviews.

We want a professional staff and we want them to be the best experts on everything that is going on that is disability related.

And just a few other ABLE South Carolina transition programs.

We are an affiliate for ADA center.

We're developing disability rights training for schools throughout our state.

I really love Community Leadership Academy.

It's on there again.

I'm going to skip over it since I already told you about it.

We host a South Carolina disability employment coalition made up of over 30 stakeholders, VR, commission for the blind, employment agency, everybody that you can imagine that's connected with disability in some way.

We are looking to change the way that South Carolina is looking at employment again for people with disabilities.

And specifically, we're focusing on creating a bridge that transitions to careers for you.

But within the coalition, a lot of exciting work is going on, and we'll be able to talk a little more about that tomorrow.

So I hope we did not overwhelm you.

We completely know how exciting this work is.

We all, I think, all of you guys as connected with a CIL, we all can do this together.

You can call or e-mail us any time.

We're here to help.

CHARLIE WALTERS: Thanks.

[ Applause ]