CHARLIE WATERS: Is this starting to make more sense?

You're looking more comfortable.

We were talking a lot last night. We know how much this is.

And I was lamenting the fact that when we present stuff in this way, all together like this, it looks like we just snapped our fingers and it came together.

And that's a really dangerous illusion, right?

It's not how it happened.

Kimberly and I were sitting at breakfast this morning picking apart every youth program that we have and talking about the ways in which they need to improve and get better.

And so when we talk about programs, it's we don't want to pass along the illusion that A, this all happened overnight, and B, that these programs are just perfect and above reproach.

It's a very imperfect thing, all of it. But we do want to share a little bit more like Seth and Joe, follow along in the same vein and share a little bit more about the nuts and bolts of some of the programs that we spoke about yesterday.

In the same way that we did yesterday, we're going to show you the logo on the slide.

Again, it's got captioning in the electronic version, and we will try to do audio descriptions of the logos as we go as well.

The title of each slide is the funding stream. We wanted to bring some clarity there and talk explicitly about where these programs are being funded as well.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: And Charlie brought up a good point. We are never going to be complacent and that is the number one rule within ABLE South Carolina and something that I continuously say to staff.

We can always do a better job.

We do pick apart our programs constantly because we can always improve.

We refuse to be complacent.

One of, one thing that I do want to let you all know, before you start writing grants, a lot of these grants that we're getting ready to talk about are all reimbursable grants.

It's very important to have unrestricted funds. When you have reimbursable grants, you have to put money up front and send the reimbursements to the funder.

One of the goals that our board had early on is that we would have at least $250,000 in unrestricted funds so that we can continue to write grants.

As they continue to grow, we are needing way much more than $250,000, so we have a strategy to do that.

I also just want to answer one question that we got on a post-it note. We received a question that said in South Carolina, youth increased to 59 and 56% overall consumers.

Is that because you quit serving so many non-youth, or did they increase the overall numbers?

We were serving a very low percentage about seven years ago of young adults.

That was one of the areas that we picked apart from the very beginning. We started to do more outreach and of course as our program started to grow.

But our adult services are just as important.

So that answer is that our overall consumer base significantly grew.

We report about 1,300 consumers one-on-one services on our 704, but our overall reach is 10,000 with group services and everything.

So we're going to start talking about EQUIP.

EQUIP was our first young adult program funded by the DD council, which is a very good relationship to have.

The DD council typically will give you seed funding for three years, whatever the term is.

Our state recognizes the importance of self-advocacy, and their self-advocacy grants are permanent as long as we do a good job.

Fortunately we have a significant amount of funding from the DD council for our self-advocacy projects.

So EQUIP, we get about $113,500 annually to do our EQUIP program.

We do get a little bit of funding, part of that from Family Connections of South Carolina, which is the PTI, which I'll talk more about later. And we put in youth leadership development in our state plan for independent living.

So all centers in our state, we have three centers for independent living in our state, all of them are doing something around youth.

CHARLIE WATERS: So the nuts and bolts of this is that at its core this is really where we see all of our other youth programming extending from.

At its core, it's a program for young adults, run by young adults.

One of the really important things here is just probably my least favorite part about it, but one of the most necessary is just having that transparency with stakeholders.

So we have quarterly stakeholder meetings, which sounds like a contradiction.

It's a program run by youth, and we want that youth leadership development.

And having that meaningful opportunity for them to lead their own program and run their own program, but on the other hand we're, we try and create that transparency with stakeholders.

This is important, right?

We don't want them to run the program, but we want them to understand that this is part of their community and this is a resource that they have access to.

So, I will quickly run by, one full-time coordinator, roughly six part time staff.

We're at 15, the slide says 13, but we are at 15 paid young adult leaders that range in age right now from 16 to 24, 25.

So this is the crux, right?

Yesterday I was talking about, you know, content area expertise.

That's not to be confused with consumer choice. You know?

Or consumer control. I'm not an expert on anybody's path.

But having the understanding of transition and having that really intimate knowledge so that you can speak to other professionals is key.

What's also key is when you're talking about these things, Sierra was talking about it earlier, Mary, too, having those youth with you.

I've drawn a line in the sand now.

I'll train teachers on self-determination all day, and the importance of self-advocacy and student-led IEPs but I'll almost never do it unless there's a young adult right beside me telling those professionals how that's impacted them personally and why that matters to them personally.

So that is a big part of it.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: And the EQUIP program, we did not start off at $114,000, we started off at $10,000.

It was the first self-advocacy program in our state.

It was actually funded by the National Youth Leadership Network, a national program that assisted us.

We actually subcontracted with them to provide the self-advocacy training to our young adults.

They said you guys have it.

We're going to go ahead and step aside and then we applied for the larger grant.

So this program has been building gradually throughout the years.

It's one of our most popular programs within our organization because we have youth in the community telling the story about Ed Roberts, telling the IL, getting IL spread throughout.

One of our fundraisers that we're getting ready to do, we're trying to get a fully accessible van so that we can get youth more on the roads in South Carolina, sharing the story of the independent living philosophy.

Any questions about the equip program?

CHARLIE WATERS: One by the door.

Tim's got it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have a question that I might as well ask now.

My center is a Part B center only.

So we work off of about $300,000 annually.

How are we, and I'm asking this as a whole, how are we to get out and have the funds when we're not able to advertise and VR is defiant, will not work with us?

KIMBERLY TISSOT: A lot of our programs, a lot of our youth programs started with Part B funding.

Yesterday I explained that when I came on to our center, all we had was part C funding.

And the importance of diversifying your funding.

You never want to rely on your federal funds at all.

And so that was a goal within our organization to start reaching out.

And advertising, you can advertise.

You can't say advertise, you can't provide marketing services with your federal funds, but you can provide outreach, and you can provide education in the community.

CHARLIE WATERS: That's a great. AUDIENCE MEMBER: I know that.

But for four years, I've been the youth coordinator, and I have gone to the 33 schools in one county that I serve. And have been turned down to get into their school.

So what does it take for me to get in?

KIMBERLY TISSOT: It's difficult.

We're going to talk about that in a few more slides, and then if we don't answer your questions up here, feel free to pull us aside and talk.

It's, it took us about two years to get into the schools.

So it does take time, but it's all about the relationships.

It's all networking, bringing the youth with you to share the story of how self-determination, self-advocacy.

Teachers talk a teacher language.

That's why I brought an education expert on our staff.

They speak this very odd language that I don't understand.

But all I can do is push IL.

But Charlie can understand the education terminology.

So we'll talk a little bit more about that in just a second.

CHARLIE WATERS: It's a great question, and I'm assuming that you bringing it up means that it's an issue elsewhere in the room as well.

Is that a correct assumption?

I see a couple heads nodding.

We're going to talk more about that, because that's a really important thing to discuss more in-depth.

Project Inclusion is another example of a program that did not spring up overnight.

This started as a project that was funded out of a regional United Way office.

Very, very small project.

Going into schools with a very limited number of staff running it. Working with students and group instruction in the classroom, working on things like self-advocacy, skill instruction and goal-setting and this type of skill building in the school.

It was later picked up by the DD council, this is another Developmental Disabilities Council grant currently.

This is in the last year of a three-year grant with the DD Council.

It started as $30,000 in the first year and see on this slide, it has decreased now in the third year, we're at $13,800 annually.

One of the important parts about this project is that it's a systems approach.

So we work with youth.

It provides us the funding that we need to work with youth directly in the classroom.

It also stipulates that we need to go out and train teachers and families, too. So the way that we do that is with youth.

So we use EQUIP leaders. We try and get that youth voice.

We always have this image in our mind of what it looks like for the teachers to be in the desks and the youth at the front of the room teaching them what they need to know.

That's a big part of Project Inclusion.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Being on the third year, we've already sustained this program and we'll talk more about that.

CHARLIE WATERS: Fantastic point.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: So with Project Rise, this grant is a little bit more complicated.

It provides one-on-one services but also a lot of systems advocacy.

Because we had a dilemma within our state.

We are, we have one of the highest unemployment rates for people with disabilities in our state and nobody was doing anything about it on the state-wide level.

So we took that initiative and went to talk to our governor.

I had a meeting, I did a little bit of stalking.

I went to a yoga session that she was at, so I talked to her there.

And she connected us with our Department of Unemployment Works.

Said you two need to come up with some kind of task force to address the employment barriers that individuals with disabilities are facing in South Carolina.

So with that, we created the South Carolina Disability Employment Coalition, which is made up of 30 stakeholders?

CHARLIE WATERS: We're close to 40 now.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: It's great.

The reason why we work with everyone, we want stakeholders involved because they also provide outreach.

They will sell your program.

We also give them ownership of the coalition, so it's not ABLE, South Carolina's coalition but everyone's coalition.

That has been able to grow our programs significantly and I know you guys do that as well.

This, so we also have a subcommittee that is actually within this coalition, it's a committee that focuses on transitions to careers that are looking at youth.

And how we can improve that transition from high school into the employment world. So we're doing a lot of work.

We have seven part-time staff members that are working on this program.

And this program, this is part of growing, right?

This program is already sustained.

We're in the last year of funding, but it's that employment first grant that I talked about yesterday.

That is going to sustain this program as well as Ticket To Work, which is an employment network within Social Security.

So from day one of a grant, we work on sustainability.

That's how we've grown very quickly.

CHARLIE WATERS: This is important, too.

We have this committee that specifically looks at transition from an inner agency perspective with self-advocates on the committee as well talking about those transition specific things.

This is not a youth specific coalition.

We're looking at issues and disability employment across the state.

But this involves youth, so youth need to be at the table and it needs to be accessible for everyone concerned.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Youth Leadership Network, our forum, we get $50,000 annually, which is great for our youth leadership forum.

We obviously use that funding to rent out the university.

We also provide personal care attendants to assist during the actual overnight experiences.

We use para transit, which is actually in-kind donation.

We go to the state house to talk with legislators.

But we treat this program like a year-long program.

We're working on it all year, although it's only an overnight summer experience, this is a year-wide program because we're also wanting to continuously engage the delegates.

So with this $50,000, we're also able to fund one part-time coordinator, 11 part-time staff, and we also fund some of the EQUIP leaders.

When I say part-time staff members, they're typically full-time staff members, with pieces of grant, they have grant hours delegated to their time.

CHARLIE WATERS: We haven't been holding true to our promise and asking for questions for each one of these programs.

Does anyone have questions so far?

Thank you.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Real quick, let me mention that we do love our other centers for independent living in our state so we also share some of the funding that we get with them.

We pay them each $3,000 to assist us with staffing, outreach, getting applications and planning the actual event.

It is a state-wide IL run program.

I just wanted to point that out.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What does MYOB stand for?

And do you just think of ideas and bring them?

You guys are popping out all of these different ideas.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Short answer is yes.

It's based off the need.

So what are the big problems in South Carolina?

How can we fix them?

Then we develop these programs and we have a lot of creative minds on our staff.

We develop these programs and we pitch them.

Sometimes we don't get funded so we try again with another funder, so it's just not giving up and really looking at the need of what our youth are facing.

What was the acronym?

MYOB?

WIOA.

CHARLIE WATERS: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

We are going to talk more about this.

It's a new piece of legislation that's all about transition.

It's not all about transition, but there is a big piece about transition.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Some people call it wee-oh-aY.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: I think it may mean something naughty in another language.

JOE MICHNER: Not supposed to say that.

I think all of us would agree up here that we got one door to open.

So we knocked on a lot of doors and that one connection we made then built into all of these other things.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Or following your governor to yoga.

JOE MICHNER: Or stalking them to yoga.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: They were happy to offer all this?

SETH HODEREWSKI: I think we all had to prove ourselves.

He asked if they're just offering all of this to us.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: No, and that's something that we want to point out, too.

It's more than asking for funding.

It's proving ourselves prior to asking for funding.

Some of these programs, like Project Inclusion, we actually tested it out prior to asking for funding for it.

We wanted to make sure it works first and can meet the needs of the community.

So relationships are significant before you can ask for funding.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: For your guys's youth leadership forum, how did you go about approaching the university, and did they assist you with any of the costs initially?

KIMBERLY TISSOT: They do provide us some in-kind donations towards the food and we get a Pepsi donation from Pepsi in South Carolina.

So Pepsi donates significantly to us.

We just really talk to them.

We actually go to a smaller university, so it's not the University of South Carolina.

We go to Columbia College, which has dorms.

It's very difficult to find accessible dorms, so we had to do a lot of tours of campuses and we found one that could definitely work with us.

So we made sure that all of the rooms were accessible, we could adjust the beds.

It takes a lot of planning to make sure that all of the events and programs are accessible to everyone with a disability.

CHARLIE WATERS: Fantastic questions.

With YLF in particular, we were, like we helped with YLF before is was a project that we were the lead of.

So we were seeing things like students were reporting back or young adults at the YLF were reporting back that 80 to 90% of them were talking about having never met a successful adult with a disability and we were hearing things and thought this has to be our baby, we have to take this.

We have to confront young adults with successful people with disabilities.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: And this is one of those permanent funding sources as well.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm hearing all this and I've seen this, but you guys make it sound like it's really easy to work with the colleges.

I'm in a town where our university is right down the street from our office, and it's nothing but red tape.

It's taken, since I have held this position, it's taken eight, nine months and finally they're reaching out to our agency.

So I'm kind of curious, like on paper, on there it looks great.

But how do you get through the red tape?

I mean it's not easy like everybody says.

It's not easy working with the school district and not any easier working with the universities.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Right, we started with the Department of Disability Services within the universities and colleges and they were not very helpful.

We went above that.

We went to the residence hall coordinator, we went to the dean.

We went to a professor that we knew that is a leadership coach that we established a relationship with.

So we really failed a lot.

And then we just kept trying until we got a yes.

So it's a lot of being annoying.

CHARLIE WATERS: We talk candidly all the time.

South Carolina stinks.

We're sixth lowest in employment outcomes for adults with disabilities.

Outcomes do not paint a picture of a South Carolina that's rainbows and koala bears eating eucalyptus leaves.

It's not perfect and not easy and we push.

Every single day we push.

It's very, very rarely just open doors.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: It's really keeping up with relationships.

Going to have coffee with your funders.

I think I have, you know, I text our funders now and check in with them and see how they're doing.

Their jobs are just as stressful as ours.

Getting that relationship with them is significant.

And we usually like our funders, too.

Some of them have turned into our friends, and that's really important.

And they trust our organization and they see the outcomes that we produce, and they're going to continue funding us because we're going to continue to do good work.

So that's important.

CHARLIE WATERS: That's a fantastic point.

Glad you mentioned. Keep us on task with that.

Because if we're painting a picture that everything just happens overnight, we don't mean to do that at all.

So the South Carolina Supported Decision Making Project is really really good, really good window into just importance of being on the cusp of what's happening.

Not just in disability rights within a state, but disability rights across the country.

Disability rights internationally, guardianship as I talked about yesterday is nothing short of an epidemic right now.

Again, I can't stress this data point enough.

Over 20 years we're seeing triple the amount of people with disabilities being put under guardianship.

Triple just in 20 years' time where we know more about success and what's, and high expectations of what's possible for all people.

So Supported Decision Making is a really good example of, and I talked about this stuff so much that I need to keep in mind that for the folks that aren't as aware of what Supported Decision Making is, when students hit 18, students with disabilities hit 18, typically mental health related disabilities, intellectual disabilities, the push from parents and school staff is they're hitting the age of majority.

If you don't want to be bumped out of the IEP process.

If you don't want to be bumped out of their personal affairs, you better go to the probate court and you better get guardianship.

That is just the language that we have been using for forever Supported Decision Making Project is a great example of, we don't have time.

It was not the case that we just had, you know, a gap and we decided to go for some additional funding, we saw a need.

This is a desperate need, not just in South Carolina, but across the country.

And so we partnered with Protection and Advocacy, our Parent Training Information Center and one of the ARCs, the statewide ARC, to start putting together resources and training and building capacity towards getting Supported Decision Making as a household name as an alternative to guardianship in the state.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: And we pay these organizations so when they write grants, guess what they do.

They include us because we included them.

We scratch their back, they scratch ours.

It is a great relationship to also share some of the funding that you receive.

This program obviously started off with a need.

We saw consumers, as a center for independent living, we are saying you make your choices.

We're going to help you make your choices.

But then we have mom and dad say they can't make the choices because I'm their guardian.

That's a huge issue.

So we wanted to do something about it and so this is how that program was born.

CHARLIE WATERS: We had a question right over here?

JOE MICHNER: I had one job, and I failed.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: So I'm just noticing that you guys have a lot of staff with all of these programs that you're putting out.

I think you guys mentioned it yesterday, how many staff you have all together.

But what would you suggest, first of all, I guess I should ask how many staff did your agency start off with?

And what would you suggest for those of us that are smaller offices like the office I work at, for example, we only have two full-time staff and two very part-time staff.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: This is where we started small, guys.

We were serving, when I came on, on our 704 report, we were serving 250 consumers and we had five real staff members that were actually being paid.

So, I think we had two volunteers. We started very small.

We only had 40 staff members.

And it looks like a lot, but a lot of these are shared positions, too.

So that's pieces of people's positions.

But 40 does sound like a lot.

We do have two offices because our territory is so large that our mileage expense would be outrageous if we only had one office.

So we do have, technically we have three offices.

This is what happens when you get a long lease, you grow.

When you're growing an organization, we had to actually rent a second office in our Greenville location because we did not have any room to put staff, which was an issue.

CHARLIE WATERS: My position, for instance, as Director of Transition Programs is funded by 12 different grants roughly.

It is piecemeal, we make it happen.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Do you want to share what you started off with and how quickly you grew your like position, really quick?

CHARLIE WATERS: Sure, there are more people like me out there, I promise.

I was coming out of, after seven years in education, I was coming off a masters in special education and sick to my stomach about how little was being taught about the ADA.

Kimberly actually came and spoke to one of my classes in grad school about IL and disability rights, and it spoke to every last thing I felt in the pit of my stomach was wrong with education and specifically, air quotes, special education.

And so I was hungry for anything other than going into a broken system and trying to change everything.

So yeah, I came on doing some ADA assessments and information and referral, and that's where we were at that point when I came on just a year and a half ago in our programming, right?

So it is just even in the past year and a half, it's just grown exponentially.

JOE MICHNER: I'll just add, we started really small, too.

Eight years ago it was Seth in a room with a candy jar.

Okay.

One program.

Now we have, I don't know how many transition employment programs?

Seven?

Eight?

Now our staff for just transition and employment services is around 28 staff. Those are mostly full-time positions.

They each have their hands in a couple different programs similar to ABLE.

CHARLIE WATERS: Fantastic questions.

Tim, time check?

Awesome. Same page, absolutely.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What's the population that you're serving?

Like, you know, your population of the town or the county?

CHARLIE WATERS: Phenomenal question.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Our region is very, very wide.

So we serve 23 counties, half the state.

We have two, three city areas, and the rest is rural.

But we are in the capital, which does give us a little bit of an advantage with some of our advocacy .

CHARLIE WATERS: And a lot of our programs especially through the DD Council or Department of Ed, as we are going to talk about in a minute, most of our youth transition programs are statewide, so we're careful to work with other centers in the state and not step on the programming that they're doing and bring them in at any possible point as collaborators.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: And they have been doing that back with us, too.

So they're including us in some grants as well.

We're starting to really grow and that's how we form that close relationship with the CILs, too.

It wasn't always like that, either.

JOE MICHNER: Lehigh Valley is, we have urban a little bit.

We have Allentown, Pennsylvania, which is a little bit urban, about 250,000 people, so a decent size city.

And the rest is pretty rural.

So we serve four counties, Lehigh, Northhampton, Carbon, Monroe.

Carbon, Monroe are very rural.

So we have a little bit of everything.

CHARLIE WATERS: Okay.

So the South Carolina Employment First Initiative, this is kind of, we probably should have put it at the end because this is very much an illustration of relationships and of, I hear the frustration with VR and voc rehab and the feeling that they have the market cornered in the eyes of other professionals when it comes to transitions.

This is why we keep plugging on and remain civil.

Things like this.

To apply for the systems change grant from ACL, this was a grant through the Administration on Community Living.

To apply for this grant we had to have memorandums of understanding with our state Department of Education, our state Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, with our UCEDD, which is our Center for Disability Resources out of our biggest university in the state, with who else?

KIMBERLY TISSOT: DDC.

KCHARLIE WATERS: Right, and with the DD Council, the Developmental Disabilities Council.

So we had to have really elaborate memorandums of agreement saying that they would engage with us in employment-first systems change.

Things like policy alignment, like opening up policies and aligning policies with employment-first principles.

And things that would make people really nervous if there wasn't that, those strong relationships despite the animosity, despite the difference in philosophy. Despite all that stuff, remaining open to that collaboration.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: I want to remind you that we had exactly ten days to write this grant.

So to get this MOU with all these people was significant.

And usually state agencies don't get MOUs back so quickly.

I remember calling the director of Special Education Services and saying, hey, I'm really nervous because we really need your superintendent's signature on this MOU and he was like, Kimberly, it usually takes like three weeks and I was like I know, but what can we do, what can we do?

And the next day the superintendent of education signed our MOU.

I will tell you that VR originally said no to us because they did not want to share some of their policies with us and they were seeing us kind of coming in as kind of enforcing their agency and we had to explain that back and forth.

I remember standing in my living room about to cry talking to VR and I was like I'm not really understanding.

We're a consumer-run organization, we are, we used to be your consumers and I'm not really understanding why you guys keep saying no to us and keep shutting the doors.

And we ended the call, five minutes later she said, hey, we're going to sign the MOU tomorrow.

You got it.

It takes some of these heart-to-heart conversations sometimes.

CHARLIE WATERS: I saw a hand in the back?

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Real quick, this is a $250,000 grant.

We do share the wealth with our fellow centers.

We give them about $30,000 a piece to help us with this program.

They're doing training to employers and assisting with some peer support efforts.

And we do have one full-time staff member and ten part-time.

Yes?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: So my question is I see that Lehigh Valley's unemployment rate for 2016 was 5.4.

I am in California, and the valley that I live in is a closed community.

It's surrounded by a mountain range on both ends.

And the unemployment rate there is 21%.

So what kind of advice would you offer for some of those programs that are linked to outcomes?

CHARLIE WATERS: Perfect. Program evaluation from the start.

So when you have that little tiny program that you're starting with, you're starting small, asking really simple questions that when you put all of that data together, it gives a really good picture.

So we ask youth that we work with in schools, are you working?

Are you competitively employed right now?

We track that through the time that we're working with them so at the end we can't say it was this program that got them a job.

We can say they weren't working when we started working with them and at the end their employment rate increased by 40%.

Using those data points, people aren't usually aware of disability employment data that need to be aware of it.

You know, for instance, we'll keep picking on voc rehab.

There are a lot of rehab counselors that I really like, I should say that, but they're not always really quick to share that data with state decision makers that need to hear it.

They don't really talk about the state unemployment rate for people with disabilities.

So we share that information pretty freely so everybody's aware of what we're looking at.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: How do you track, how do you survey the consumers?

And then how long do you follow them along to make sure that they're still employed?

CHARLIE WATERS: That's a great question and varies across programs.

I should point out, some programs like this one through ACL, ACL is very interested in outcomes particularly for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We've shaped this into a cross disability program, the South Carolina Employment First Initiative.

But this one, they're mostly concerned with our core indicator for this program is outcomes for youth with intellectual developmental disabilities.

So we wrote in tracking the frequency of competitive employment experiences while in high school.

Not being tracked anywhere in the state right now.

So we are putting mechanisms in place to look at that.

And at the time of graduation. And that's just for that program.

It varies.

I think program evaluation is usually one that's stipulated by the funder.

We add in stuff, but that's one where you don't always have a whole lot of creative room or creative control.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: And we are looking at changing that a little bit and maybe starting freshman year to senior just to kind of follow to show the impact that we had on the individual and what they gained.

CHARLIE WATERS: We believe transition starts in elementary school.

Understanding that philosophy, too, as we're talking with people especially as we are working with students that are receiving special education services.

Does everyone know what the purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities and Education Act is?

The purpose, the statement of intent at the very beginning of IDEA?

This is the law that governs all special ed services across the country.

The purpose of special education from preschool through the third senior year is to prepare students, did you have an answer?

Was I going to steal your thunder?

IDEA, it is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

That is the one that started as the Education of all Handicapped Children Act, which was the law that provided access for the first time, full access for students with disabilities back in the mid '70s.

So it has evolved over the years, yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My guess was to ensure that students with disabilities received a free and appropriate education.

CHARLIE WATERS: Yes, but even more broadly than that, the purpose.

This is so important.

This is why we talk about becoming as sharp as possible with this stuff.

The sole purpose of special ed services is to prepare students for independent living.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Bam.

CHARLIE WATERS: Further education and employment. That's it.

When you start talking about that, elementary school teachers don't know that, high school teachers almost never know that.

When we are talking about where centers are situated and providing services, we have to go back to speaking that language.

And when you start speaking that language it's clear, like I said yesterday, there's nobody better than the center.

Nobody.

So we have to really motor through these last few.

So this is one of the sustainability pieces.

This is another one that wouldn't have come in the first year of really focusing on youth programming.

This is a $70,000 annual contract with the state Department of Education.

All they want us to do is go to any schools anywhere in the state and provide direct services to youth on self advocacy.

Any skills that are going to increase employment rates.

It's the loosest funding stream we have.

All they want us to do is go to schools and work with youth.

This also allows us kind of unlimited funding stream for training professionals, too.

So we've been working with a lot more professionals doing trainings on stuff that we want to do trainings on.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: This is a start-up program right now with Department of Education.

They told us if we do a really good job, they'll give us a line item.

So it's very important and we're trying to do a very, very good job for them to get permanent funding.

CHARLIE WATERS: So quickly, we talked about these transition conferences, mapping your future and empowering your future.

There was no professional developmental opportunity in the state in transition.

There was no single day of learning or really good learning source for families and students in transition in the state.

This was a need.

We fit it.

It's a small program.

It's $30,000 annually.

Conferences make my skin crawl.

I was just telling Kimberly, doing this last one in March nearly killed me on top of the other stuff that we're doing, but it's a need.

When you put yourself very publicly as an agency that's running, doing something that's not being done, you do it collaboratively with other agencies, you assert yourselves as someone who has a stake in transition and you're committed to keeping the ball rolling.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Any Utah CILs here?

Anybody from Utah?

Thank you so much for doing whatever you've been doing because we got funding for our pre-employment services because of what the CILs were doing there with working with their VR.

CHARLIE WATERS: Yay Utah.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: One of your directors from VR transferred to South Carolina to the South Carolina Commission for the Blind.

They never contracted with the center for independent living before, but because of the reputation, I had a memo in my box one day and said we want you to apply for this funding and we want to give you a significant amount of money.

Okay.

Cool.

Easy.

We get $180,000 annually.

We have two part-time coordinators.

It's funded by the South Carolina Commission for the Blind, not our VR.

We spoke about that the other day.

And also our whole CIL network participates in this.

This is a fee for service.

We charge a set fee per consumer that we serve.

We're going to skip over this because we had a question about the Parent Training and Information Centers.

To get into these, you need to go have a heart-to-heart conversation with the executive director of the PTI.

Their philosophies are very similar to us, a little bit reversed, but they feel that parents, it's very peer-based philosophy.

They believe that parents are the best experts for helping other parents.

Guess what we believe.

Consumers are the best experts at their own needs.

Consumers are better with peer-related services.

That is how I sold our services.

I also gave some examples of why parents should not be providing youth services.

And that's why we get $26,000 annually.

That's not very much, but their overall funding source is not very large.

So that's a significant part of their budget, which we're very grateful for.

This assists us with funding our EQUIP program and seven part-time staff members.

We assisted them in the process of getting the PTI grant.

So we assisted them with writing their actual PTI grant because our PTI in our state is new.

Work incentive planning, this is actually, we sub contract out from our sister organization in our state, Walton Options for Independent Living.

We are focusing on youth with providing work incentive training.

We have three full-time staff members, and two part-time staff members that provide this service, and we provide a lot of outreach, and we are in the schools educating teachers because we've heard teachers before say you don't need to work, you can get on Social Security.

So we do some education there.

CHARLIE WATERS: So the state affiliate for the Southeast ADA Center.

Is everyone familiar with their regional ADA Network?

So in the southeast, it's, you know, all the south eastern states are represented within the southeast, within the Southeast ADA Center.

It wasn't even a disability-related organization.

It was an agency that said they didn't even have to serve people with disabilities before we took over as the affiliate in South Carolina.

It was the Department of Employment and Work Force who before WIOA said oh yeah, people with disabilities, they go to VR.

Okay, but they were the affiliate.

This is a really cool way to just have, again, put your foot in the door as experts in the ADA, right?

Centers are uniquely situated.

Most people don't know anything about the ADA, especially people in education.

They don't know anything about the ADA.

This is a foot in the door for schools, too.

When you start talking about, talking with teachers or having talks with other schools, ask them leading questions like Hey, are you talking with students about disability disclosure in the workplace and the process of securing reasonable accommodations?

Teachers will look at you like they've never heard it before because most of them haven't.

They're not preparing students with it.

As the state affiliate for the Southeast ADA Center, we would be doing it anyway, but it gives us a little bit of recognition in that.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: When you transition, when you go to college, you don't have the IDEA, it goes away.

You don't have that.

So you have to really rely on the Rehab Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

That is very important.

That is a key piece of legislation that you've got to educate for transition.

CHARLIE WATERS: And we did mention with Capable and Ready, the Commission for the Blind funded program, back to that point with VR.

We don't get a dollar from VR.

This was going in the back door with WIOA, if you're in a state where it's separate services between VR and the agency that serves people with visual disabilities, it might be separate, but they still have to serve potentially eligible clients or consumers, in high school in transition.

So we can talk more this.

You know Joe made an off-hand comment about just reading the regs of WIOA for fun.

It's not really all that much of a joke.

Get familiar with the regs.

I'm volunteering Paula.

You've got resident experts who can help you speak that language.

VR in South Carolina is still labeling students as employable and not employable with no vocational assessments. So in South Carolina, I just heard from the second largest school district in the state.

The VR counselor there, this is why it's so tricky and why VR has the transition market cornered.

Because they have dedicated rehab counselors for school districts. But when I talked to the school district, she told one of the district administrators told me that VR is saying we'll work with these classes but not these classes of students over here because those students are not employable.

Are you serious?

So understanding what VR's obligation is under WIOA shows us exactly where the window is wide open for us to say, Oh man, they're supposed to be serving all potentially eligible students.

We can help with that.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: We go into all classrooms.

CHARLIE WATERS: Important stuff there.

I know it's not necessarily everything you need, but let's talk on the break and keep this conversation going.

This isn't nearly as important, but if you have Seth and Joe were talking about it, if you have transition councils, get in the transition conversations.

People are having them in your state right now, and you may or may not be at the table for those.

Getting at every single table you possibly can.

Workforce development is big with WIOA.

So within your state right now, there are large conversations happening about work force development.

They are required to serve people with disabilities as a priority population, and before WIOA, a lot of them were talking like South Carolina like Oh, we don't really ever see anybody with a disability.

We don't have to serve them.

They're obligated under federal law to do so now.

So find where those conversations are happening and educate them if they're not looking for you.

Okay. We have time for maybe a quick question?

Definitely have time for lots of post-its.

Y'all are wonderful.

Thank you so much.

We know it's a lot.

We hope you're getting what you need to keep the conversation going.

KIMBERLY TISSOT: Thank you.