>> Tim Fuchs: I think we're ready to roll, so we're going to go ahead -- oh, and, by the way, Folx I'm going to leave about 15 seconds of silence before we start just to make sure everyone is connected before we start any content so don't be surprised when I do that and I'll tell the audience, of what I'm up to. We are going live in 5, 4, three.... >> Tim Fuchs: (Electronic voice) recording in progress. >> Tim Fuchs: Welcome everyone, I'm going to give about a 15-second pause just to make sure everyone's contacted before we start our content today. (A pause), (3:01:34 p.m.Eastern Daylight Time) Okay. Thanks, we always like to give that pause, just to make sure everyone can see and hear us before we start... so! Welcome to today's presentation, I'm Titans with the National Council on Independent Living, and I'm going to welcome you-all to our latest IL-NET webinar, How CILs Can (and Should!) Support Consumers in the Criminal Legal System. We have a great turnout, had over 370 people register for this event. We have been very excited about this behind the scenes and I'm glad to see that you-all are excited for it too so I have just a bit of housekeeping to begin with. Before we start today. As you would probably imagine. So as I said, I'm Tim Fuchs from NCIL. I'm a white man, 40 years old, with dirty blond hair, very dirty blond hair actually, pretty dark. I have to stop calling it blond at some point, I think. In my home office here, I've got a white background, wearing a Navy blue pullover today. And, today's presentation as always is brought to you by the IL-NET training and technical assistance r project, brought by ILRU -- excuse me, University of Montana, with support provided by Administration for Community Living at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as always we are recording today's call, so that you can access it on ILRU's Web site. That will be up within 48 hours, usually, sooner, if we can pull it off. We're currently in presentation mode. But we will have plenty of time for audience questions today, And, I'll give instructions for asking questions, before we take each Q&A break. Tim Fuchs: We, of course, have captioning, and ASL interpreters available today. You should be seeing, David, our current ASL interpreter on screen with me right now; and you can turn on the captioning, By selecting show subtitle from your closed caption options. If you don't see that, in your Zoom menu bar, you might want to check under the more options. I am screen-sharing today, so you'll want to make sure that you're in gallery view. And side by side mode. Now, I've set it to display that way. That should be happening automatically but if it does not appear right, at the top of your screen, you should see, a green bar that says "you are viewing Tim Fuchs's screen" and there's a drop-down there. You'll want to make sure that you have side-by-side mode selected. If you're using dual monitors today, you can also select optimize for dual monitors in that same drop-down.
And that will help you, if you're using two screens. Finally, there is an evaluation form for today's webinar. A satisfaction survey that will open on your screen, when we close the webinar today. Please take a moment to fill that out. We take your feedback very seriously and we use it all the time to help improve our webinar and events. And, so, again, when I close the webinar, that will actually open on your screen. >> Tim Fuchs: And.... See, I'm going to go ahead to Slide 3. Which I should have done a moment ago. There are those questions instructions and, again, I'm remind you of those before we take our break withs, you can use the Q&A, e-mail me at tym@NCIL.org and if if you are on your phone and we do have a couple of callers you can press star 9 on your key pap pad and submit your question. You can submit your questions at any time today but we will wait until the time for Q&A to address them. All right, I will -- introduce our speakers, and -- and thank them very much, for offering us their time, and expertise. LT, again, I'm really excited about this and there are not a lot of people in the country, doing this work, in fact, here they are, with us today we have Sharif Brown, the program manager for reentry, at Alliance Of Disability Advocates in North Carolina. And Scott Burlingame Scott, of course, the Executive Director of Independence, Inc., in North Dakota. Sharif, and Scott thanks for joining us, really excited to get this started. Those are my housekeeping notes if you have any other questions or technical issues let me know in the chat. The chat is set up just to come to the panelists today, but if you need any support that's the right place to let us know, and I'll get back to you with any technical support requests or other questions as soon as I can, and here on Slide 5 just quickly, learning objectives for today, you might remember these from the -- Training announcement, so what we're going to learn, examples of programs, community partnerships, and funding sources that support consumers who are in the criminal legal system or transitioning home from the prison system, creative approaches that educate and support consumers in the criminal legal system to successfully transition back in the community. And finally, proven strategies to build a program, that is consumer-controlled, and best-supports people with their own goals and challenges. All right. So let's dive into our real content for today. So, obviously, we want to get a bit of an over view of what Scott and Sharif are doing at their CILs, we're going to begin with Sharif in North Carolina, I was wondering about your program, what is involved how you started this work >> Sharif Brown: Tim thanks for allowing me to present today on this much needed topic of reentry for any individual who has a visual impairment. My name is Sharif Brown. I am an African-American male, I am sitting in my home office, with a white background. I have on a gray button-up shirt with a collar, full beard, and, a set of glasses. Old age, gets to you! But, as far as, my program like I said I work with Alliance Of Disability Advocates. We are a Center for Independent Living, located in Raleigh, the five-counties that we serve are W., Durham Johnson, Franklin and Orange, in North Carolina. The name of the program, that I manage is called "ADA reentry", and how we, actually, got started, in this reentry field in 2016, my prior Executive Director, had the opportunity to connect with Buttoner federal prison a federal compound institution, or -- incarceration facility in North Carolina that actually houses five different prisons. So essentially, five prisons on one compound. And my previous Executive Director, noticed that there is a vastly-underserved population, that, Is in prison right now, for individuals who have disabilities; so, I was able to go in to Butner federal compound and implement, the independent living philosophy that every CIL is supposed to promote. About individualized reentry plans for consumers coming out of -- of -- of these jails, and in incarceration. So with this IRP, which stands for Individualized Reentry Plan, we were able to assist 200 individuals -- justice involved individuals, at Butner, and only had a recidivism rate of 2%, so only 2 of the 200 went back. Once the state of North Carolina, and more specifically, NCCDD, which is the North Carolina council for developmental disabilities, They wanted to test this model on the state level, as the state recidivism rate right now currently sits at roughly about 46%; so, they enabled us with a grant, to test this model on the state level, to try to bring down the recidivism rate on the state level, similar to how we were able to do on the federal level. >> SHSH. Sharif Brown: It's near and dear to my heart on reentry because I had a brother who did 20 years collectively in upstate New York prisons, multiple habitual offender, due to the lack of reentry services that he did not receive, when he was released, and, he reoffended multiple times; so, I had the --
I now have the opportunity, to assist other individuals, with their reentry so this is near and dear to my heart. This is not just something that I do for a paycheck. I'm actually really personally invested in this reentry program. So, that's what we are. As an overview, obviously, I'm pretty sure we'll get more into it with the rest of the questions but Scott, I will leave it with you >> Scott Burlingame : All right. Thank you so much, Sharif. I always appreciate hearing that, and just to let everybody know, my name is Scott Burlingame . I am sitting right now in my work office. I've got a little bit of a brick window behind me in a blue wall and I have a headphone on to enable to make me look like I'm talk on airplanes, or on a Zoom call, gray goatee and glasses and brown hair, for the purposes of full inclusion me pronouns I use are he/him, and -- I am really excited to -- And for this opportunity because this has been a process, probably taken us about 4 or five years to get to this point, and so as I prepared for this, kind of looking back in time and looking at how we got to where we are and why it is extraordinarily. Fulfilling I guess to kind of say, you know, hey, we had these ideas and how we got here. So let me explain to you-all a little bit about who we are, and what we do. Independence, Incorporated, we've been around for 26 years, we serve 11 counties in northwestern North Dakota. And as you would expect, the population of those counties are -- pretty small. Our -- the city I live in has a population of under 50,000 so we have no metropolitan areas or micrometropolitan areas even within our service area; so it's a very rural community. We do have two Indian reservations within our community and we're going to go into that discussion as we go on today. The way that it came about that we served this actually, was, again, a few years ago, having a conversation with -- the people we serve, and -- and the communities in which we serve, about what the needs were for people with disabilities. And really, having a very open mind to cross-disability services, so talking to people about, you know, all types of disabilities, and what are their biggest barriers? And, so, probably, the -- the thing that opened up this portal to getting to where we are today, was discussions about, how people who had criminal justice backgrounds, or some kind of a criminal history, or something like that, especially felonies -- were struggling to get housing, and employment. And, while housing and employment, are things that we, as talked about for centers of independent living for generations, so, of course, those are things that we could do; so then, really looking at, how we could kind of, you know, serve that population. And -- and one of the things that I just want to kind of go back to when I talk about the ruralness, and the relatively small population that we work with -- ... In order to truly serve our community, we had to be aggressive. And intentional maybe is a better term with wanting to serve, truly, all ages, all types of disabilities. And, in that process, of looking at how people with disabilities ended up as part of the criminal justice system, you know, it's interesting. In the independent living movement, of course, we're a peer-driven organization. I'm a person who has learning disabilities, and mental health issues. And the percentage of people with disabilities like mine who end up as part of the criminal justice system, is exceptionally high. And so, I really do think that... having that That reality that if it wasn't for a lot of lucky breaks on my part, and unquestionably some privilege -- my chances of being part of the criminal justice is very high. And I can say that because, my siblings, who have the same disabilities as I do, are a part of the criminal justice system. And then, you know, so as we move on to that, we had real discussions about, um... How we could, you know, better-serve that and what were the trends within our community.
And, unfortunately, at about that same time there was a large discussion about drug abuse, and addiction, within our community.
And so we had, injected ourselves into that conversation, and how we could be part of the communitywide solution to that problem that was killing so many of our -- of our brothers and sisters with disabilities. >> Scott Burlingame : And so we began to really have a lot of interactions about the fact that when you look at, how we are treating addiction, and mental health, not as -- Diseases, or disabilities, but rather, as a criminal justice problem. And looking at the fact that so many of us are being incarcerated because of that. That was unacceptable. And so we really wanted to move away from that -- or -- or move our community away from that. Really make it part of a communitywide discussion, and --
and then, inserting where our center can use the things that we do well, as a Center for Independent Living in order to do that. So, fast-forwarding a little bit, the state of North Dakota began a program about three years ago, The governor's wife in North Dakota, First Lady, is a person living in long-term recovery and she -- when -- her husband was elected -- the governor was elected they really made issues around addiction and criminal justice reform part of their agenda. And we did our best to interject ourselves into that. So -- and so there's two programs that we are a part of. One of them is, the prerecovery program and the other one is community connect. And they are both programs that work with people who have behavioral health issues, and addiction. And, are part of either the criminal justice system, or at risk of being part of the criminal justice system. So, with that, I will -- I have a whole lot more to talk about as we go on but I will hand it back over to Tim for the next question. >> Tim Fuchs: All right, thanks you-all. Great history! Great numbers. Excited to hear more. So let's go ahead to Slide 7. So Sharif, coming back to you: One of the things we really wanted to talk about, especially with so few centers around the country doing this work, was the why. Right? And it's right there in the -- title of our webinar, right? Not just how can we do this work? But why -- why should CILs be doing this work? So as it says here on Slide 7, would you share why you began doing this work? And why this is something not just that the CILs can do, but really should be doing? >> Sharif Brown: Well, that's, actually, a great question, Tim, I would like to address in two-folds, first why? I think that anyone who is involved in any kind of a CIL, or anyone who is promoting this independent living philosophy, has to recognize that currently, right now, to date there are 750,000 individuals that are incarcerated that have some form of a disability. Two-thirds of that 750,000 either have a cognitive disability, an I/DD or sometimes dual disabilities and centers for independent living -- we're dedicated to assisting our consumers with their independence, And trying to live their life to their best capacity. So that's the reason why, we need to do this kind of work. There are so many underserved individuals, that are incarcerated, that have disabilities, that are not receiving services, that are valuable to them. Anyone who has any kind of connection to the criminal justice system, whether it's lived experience. Family members who have that experience. Or anyone else, you will recognize and realize that there are really no reentry services that are going to be individualized. Everything is going to be cookie-cutter. Because essentially, the prisons and the jails, they have an obligation to provide reentry services. We all are aware of that. However, they are only liable to provide the lowest level of reentry services and then their obligation is met. Now, this is not to cast apirations on every single reentry program and every single prison or every single state facility; however, the numbers show that the reentry programs are lastluster which enables my agency to go in and actually meet with these consumers on a one-on-one basis. And formulate a plan, that, they're in charge of. Not us. We're not here to tell anyone what we think they need for their reentry. We're here to facilitate and connect them with resources in the general public, That will assist them with their reentry, so they can stay out and get viable employment. And get housing, and be integrated back into the community of their choice. So this -- that's the reason why we're doing this. Now, can the CILs do this? Absolutely! Because, anyone who has any connection to a CIL, we all know that there are five core services that we must perform. One of them is going to be transitional services. Now, how each CIL breaks down or decides which direction to go in, when it comes to transitional services, Is completely up to that CIL. However, the majority of the CILs are only addressing -- and this is not saying that this is not a need that needs to be addressed, because it is. I'm not trying to take anything away. Nursing homes... -- any kind of assisted living facilities, group homes, everybody at a CIL deems that as an institution, so that's what the majority of the CILs are concentrating their focus on with transitioning individuals out of those settings. And that's great. But if you forget about the prison system, individuals who have a disability in there, you're missing a great... portion of the population that we serve. Because an individual can go into prison, deemed as normal. With no disability. And can easily come out with one. Whether that's health-related, whether that's an accident. Whether that's assault by staff.
Assault by other inmates, whatever it might be. 80% of the individuals that go into prison, that come out with a new disability, obtain that disability when they're incarcerated. So people have to start thinking about you can walk in without a disability. And then you can walk out with one; and then now, what do you do? Where are the resources? Where are the connections to that community? Because you're not going to be able to get access to those resources, while you're incarcerated. Because if the prison system had that reentry program in place, to where you can get everything you need, most people would not reoffend and go back but then that would stop the prison system from getting money, and it's one big system and everybody knows. So just an overview of why we're doing what we're doing. And every CIL can also do this as well, because the money is allocated, in your Part C for transitional services, however, you decide to allocate those funds, or which direction you choose to go to when it comes to transitions back into community living, is up to the CIL. So, Tim. That's my answer for that. Scott I'll come to you >> Tim Fuchs: Great case, thanks Sharif, all right, Scott, let's hear from you >> Scott Burlingame : All right, I think, that a lot of exactly what Sharif just said but just adding a few more things on to it. First off -- we -- I want to make sure everybody understands when I say that we have this large program helping people who are institutionalized within the jail system, or at risk of being institutionalized. It doesn't mean we don't do the other services because we do. We have had our busiest year ever as far as helping people transition out of, you know, more traditional institutional settings. However, we do also have to admit that some progress has been made in that area, over generations, I talked to, you know, people that have been in the field longer than I have and they talk about how it used to be about helping somebody get a -- personal care attendant for a few hours a day or maybe building a ramp and the people were helping out. People with physical disabilities are much more intense. So we've made a lot of progress as a -- Movement, in that area, however... as I said earlier, the amount of folks with disabilities who are getting -- who are -- well, unfortunately because of a lack of community services being -- ware housed if you will within the criminal justice system, it's pretty unacceptable and, you know, it's also -- it's not effective. It's expensive. And, and nobody should probably be happy with it. So if we are going to be part of -- you know, radical change within our community, we should be part of this discussion that is happening, and nationwide, and I'm guessing in most if not all of the communities that you-all are a part of right now -- these discussions are happening. So are we, as centers for independent living -- we should be at that table, we should be there, having conversations. And in part because of, again, what centers for independent living do well. When people are institutionalized, in prisons, they don't have the ability to make a whole lot of decisions for themselves. And really, as -- any part of the criminal justice system, they have very little autonomy, and inability to make decisions.
And, when they come to us, and we sit down with them and we say, "What is your personal plan for avoiding criminal justice?" What is your plan for finding housing and finding employment and avoiding criminal justice system? And getting needed mental health care and what do you think the barriers are? It's such a game-changer in many ways because so much of the criminal justice system actually doesn't ask what do you think the problem is? But rather tell them here's the problem and here's how you're going to fix it. And so the core part of independent living has always been individualized planning and honestly, even if people choose to use independence as services, or not -- You know, nobody's forced to use it. Nobody -- we don't allow, you know -- We are not -- the judges -- the parole officers or anybody like that. They can't force them, they can definitely recommend, and -- and I'm proud to say that, our services have a good enough reputation, to where they're very good at recommending our services. But if somebody doesn't choose our services, we're not appropriate for them, and that's okay. Because, there's enough work to go around. So I just really think that if centers for independent living are going to be part of -- of, you know, again, radical inclusion, and radical change within our communities, this is a little bit where that discussion is happening right now >> Scott Burlingame : (Continuing), and I just think that it's so important to stay relevant as we go forward. (After a pause), and so, yeah, I think that, it's just a really important part to be part of the -- the next wave of change that's happening within the greater disability community. And with that I'll hand it back over to you, >> Tim Fuchs: Great points, you-all, thanks. Yeah, I think that, you know, what strikes me, or is -- how difficult transition work is anyway. You know, CILs have been doing transition work for decades, despite knowing the situation with -- with accessible housing.
In communities. Right? Just -- on -- ongoing monolithic problems, that can be so overwhelming; and yet, we do it anyway and so I think that, you know, maybe to paraphrase Bobby Kennedy a little bit, let's not ask why not. Let's just focus on the why we should be doing this. And start. Start somewhere. >> Tim Fuchs: So in order to start: -- I'm going to go to Slide 8! How you pay for this work -- this is always the million-dollar question, no pun intended, but whenever we talk about new programming or expanding programming, you know, the big barrier is always, how am I going to pay for that? And -- and I'm going to ask you to be gentle with us, because, you know, we're not going to be able to just hand you -- (laughing), a grant to begin doing this work in your community. But what we do have, are a couple of different.... Scenarios, from each of our panelists communities, that could be good models or things for you-all to consider. So Sharif, I'm going to come back to you-all just to talk about how alliance was able to get started in funding this work >> Sharif Brown: Sure, that's always going to be the elephant in the room, is always going to be funding. Like I alluded to earlier, we were able to get connected with Butner federal compound through the Part C. Now, obviously, everybody -- every CIL has a different amount of Part C money, I'm pretty sure is allocated to different places, but Part C will always be one way to look at it in discretional funds would be another one. Maybe even some part B funding, but also, obviously, grants like you say, no one is handing out grants, without at least approve proven track record, that the work you're doing is actually working so I would say at the grassroots level it's to try to link up with any.... I wouldn't say county jails because there are so many. But try to get with the state prison or if there's a federal prison that is in your area, try to get in contact with the Warden. The prisons are always welcome to bring individuals in on a volunteer situational status, that's what you will be referred to as once you go into the prisons when you do this work, so that's always a way to start, to at least get that connection to the prisons. And actually start serving individuals. And then once you can prove that your work is viable, then you can always try to see if there's a grant out there, that can further facilitate your financial needs. Also, volunteer work, is very big, especially for us, at Alliance Of Disability Advocates, we currently have partnerships with Duke University, on two different levels. One of them, they're doing data research for us, and the other one, is that we have volunteer students from Duke that are actually, monitoring, and mentoring a GED program, that, they're tutoring individuals, whether virtually or in person, for their GED, it's a free, training and tutoring sessions. They do not have to pay. The agency will, then, pay for the GED testing, once that's completed. And the cherry at the end of it, because we have so many other partnerships, we also have a partnership with Monarch, that is willing to give justice-involved individuals a guaranteed -- Job interview. And Monarch is a huge employment base network, that receives over 1,000 applications a week; so, to have that certification or to have that promise, that anyone who is involved with ADA reentry, will get a guaranteed job interview, is huge. So, it's all about partnerships, it's all about trying to find volunteers that are willing to help you try to find grants, but like I alluded to at the foundational level: Before you can get to the grants, I would say, get with your Executive Director, if you are -- if you are an Executive Director -- Look into your Part C funding. And then see if you're able to pay for this work or at least build the time to Part C, to start doing this transitional work. And I will bring it over to Scott. >> Scott Burlingame : Okay. Thank you, again, Sharif. A couple of different things, yes, -- Independence and all the centers in North Dakota, each get some Part C dollars some part B dollars and we're fortunate as well, with the state has thrown in additional money for our network of centers as well. And so that was really the seed money for what we did and continues to be the backbone of what we do. And any -- the real priority, the real thing was is that. We don't have enough funding to do everything we could possibly do. We don't have enough funding to -- and we don't even pretend that we are fixing all the problems for all people with disabilities, or that we can. So because we are limited funded how do we ensure that we get the most bang for the buck for the programming that we do? And every time I talk about this, I make sure I qualify it by saying no person has ever been turned down for services. We -- You know, we -- it's -- that's not what I'm talking about but rather, I'm talking about how you can manipulate through outreach and through relationships built, in order to do stuff so that's really what started, just traditional B, C dollars and providing outreach and community engagement around these issues. Now, the programs I talked about, the community connect and the keys to recovery programs, that was actually we kind of hopped onto because we were already doing things. We were able to hop on to some state reform that was happening, the free to recovery person was paid 50%, dollars through the Department of Corrections and 50% through dollars for the -- Health and human services and the reason is -- is on both fronts, both organizations agree, that, investing in trying to get people transitioned successfully, into the community, and, getting them not going back in the criminal justice system will save both organizations more money and so we've been able to tap into those -- that, you know, those -- fee-for-service programming. In order to beef up. And provide better services, and also to connect with better, you know -- with other people, other than just centers for independent living but other nonprofits, from around the state who are doing similar services. And develop a network of knowledge in order to better serve people and help to achieve better outcomes; and -- and, again, as I said earlier, if somebody doesn't choose Independence they can choose some of those other organizations and we'll still provide services to them through B and C, and still do everything we can to help them be successful but on a statewide issue, it was mostly funded through a combination of -- other than our BC, but the new dollars if you will, dollars from the Department of -- Corrections, and The Department of Human Services for the purpose of helping people with addiction, and behavioral health issues and staying out of the criminal justice system. So... (Concludes remarks), Tim Fuchs: Great, thanks you-all. So Alliance was able to start their work with Part C dollars and then leverage state funding from there. And Independence was able to start it with funding from a state program, and a staunchly-red state. So there is -- there is hope out there for these programs. I think the -- funding these programs, I mean, so I think the idea is just to make a plan and get started. (A pause), all right. Slide 9, this is really important to this work. We wanted to make time to talk about this, so, Sharif, coming back to you: How important is, lived experience, and peer support in your work, so, obviously, these things are hallmarks of the independent living Movement, and we all applied very comfortably when we talk about disability identity. But how much do they match in terms of, lived experience, with experience with incarceration, in the criminal legal system? And other identities and experiences that people have? >> Sharif Brown: To say that this is probably one of the most important facets of the program -- is an understatement.
The great thing about my reentry team is that I have two certified peer support specialists who work, under me. So, my team is wonderful, which allows us to give that full wrap-around services for any individual who is being released into one of the five counties that we serve. But on -- as far as the program goes: Like, most things, like, most problems in life when you're looking for assistance, you want to speak to an individual who either has, some kind of lived experience, or at least knows a little bit about that. And throughout my multiple presentations that I've done inside of multiple prisons, the one thing that seems to be universally-consistent across the board, is trust. If you do not have the trust of these justice-involved consumers that you're serving, you can forget it! It's never going to work. The program will never work. Because they're not going to trust you and it has nothing to do with you. You have to understand the environment that you're walking in to. Where trust is lack luster at best. So to have two individuals, that I can bring in that have lived experience and are both certified peer support specialists that can give that support, that can give that ear, that shoulder, that direction, That connection to resources, whatever it might be -- is always going to be vital. And, of course, because we're a Center for Independent Living --
51% of the staff have to have a disability as well. So even if it's not necessarily the peer support from a justice-involved individual that they're looking for; it might just be how to live life with your newly-acquired disability; so that's also going to be peer support. So that's going to be huge, because once you gain that trust of that Consumer, and their belief in you, and in that program, they now have some skin in the game >> Sharif Brown: Which means that they're going to be dedicated, and focused, on their reentry knowing that they have an agency, or at least a peer support specialist, who is there. Who understands, what it looks like, to have to transition from prison. Who understand what it looks like, to have that systemic racism placed upon your head, because of whatever felony that you might have. Who understands, the lack of resources, that are out there, because most of society does not want to help justice-involved individuals. So, to have that peer-support foundation, built in to the program, and built in to our Center for Independent Living, anyway -- Like I said, is probably one of the strongest foundations that we have within the Program which is the reason why, one of the reasons why -- the Program is as successful as it is right now. So kudos to my team! I appreciate you guys. [APPLAUSE]
Tim Fuchs: Thanks Sharif, Scott, I know you want to hit on some of the same points, but in your experience, same question about lived experience, and peer support in this work, through your programs >> Scott Burlingame : Yeah, and absolutely, and it is -- it is kind of an interesting spot, where the intersection of the work that we're doing, with uh, people that are justice-involved and people who we've always served, is, the importance of peer support. And people that have been there.
Excuse me. We really -- our programming does have, the capacity, to hire peer-support specialists. For the purpose of people who have -- been part of the criminal justice system. Are thriving in the community now. And are willing to give back. And so that is built into the core of not only our -- obviously, our Center for Independent Living, but also specifically, looking for people, with lived experience, right here. We have also hired Staff who have lived experience, and that was one of the important things, I think, to kind of push our organization into... The changes from -- that come with serving this population, is that we had a staff member who had -- you know, who was a felon. A staff member who was a person who was living in recovery. A person who had been part of the criminal justice system; sitting at the table with us, as we were doing this, and she's no longer employed with us at this point. But that was extraordinarily important, so that, I mean, -- again, I know I'm talking to a network of people who are part of the independent living movement. I don't think I have to explain why that's important but it was, again, the intentionality of really saying, you know, we want to hear from people who are a part of this. And just -- how much did that peer support, too, they can enhance the work being done by our staff. And maybe, even be kind of a different -- different voice, at the table from time to time >> Scott Burlingame : And I think to kind of build off of what Sharif said, too, and, again, going a little bit back to the intersection of independent living over half of our board -- I'm sorry, over half of our staff, in this case, are persons with -- lived experience. And so, being able to talk about even if they're not part of the criminal justice system, their lived experience isn't necessarily, the same but just being, like, hey, you know what?
I struggled to get housing, too, or I struggled to get employment before too. Or, I struggled to get needed healthcare, before too, or -- you know, and just being able to -- be unapologetic in that process of saying, you know, what? We are you, we're on this team together. And I think that that has been, exceptional -- and that is -- something that differentiates us as a Center for Independent Living from all of the other nonprofits I talked about earlier, who are providing similar services: We are the only one that is -- you know, over half of our staff, are people -- persons with lived experience; so it's extraordinarily important. (Pause), Tim Fuchs: Great, thanks to you both. All right. So here on Slide 10, how do implicit bias and racism impact this work? And how have you worked through that? And so this really builds on that last question. Around lived experience, and trust -- in my opinion, anybody that touches this program at your organization is going to have to understand systemic racism, implicit bias and how these things dovetail with this work. And I -- not just people who are -- you know, interacting with folks, that are participating in the program, but really anybody that's running, or touching the program, needs to have -- an understanding of this; so, Sharif, I'm going to have you respond first, and then we'll go to Scott >> Sharif Brown: Sure, there's just so many layers to this onion. Obviously, it doesn't have to be said that the majority of individuals who are incarcerated, are going to be African-American. I think everybody recognizes that. That's throughout America. Then we have to add on to the fact that, you can have a disability, as well. Which is also going to bring on some kind of implicit bias or racism from society, and then you have to add on to the fact, also that now, you have a felony. So now, essentially you have three things working against you before you even step foot out of the prison: So what I've come to realize, is that, the only way that someone is going to be able to have successful reentry, is that the community that they're being integrated back into. Has to be accepting. If they're not going to be accepting this, it's never going to work for that consumer or that justice-involved individual. Employment is always going to be one of the big hurdles. Luckily, now, that bias question of have you ever been convicted of a felony? Has now been removed from the job applications. Was kind of -- evens the playing field somewhat, but not completely because once they do a background check, it's going to come up anyway. And then now, you have to deal with those employers, who are, actually, willing to give second chances and not just saying yes, our organization or our company gives second chances. But has a proven track record of giving second chances to individuals, that are justice-involved. Housing as well, is another hurdle when it comes to implicit bias and racism, because like I alluded to earlier, most people do not want to give second chances or resources, for individuals that are coming out of prison, because unfortunately, society looks at those individuals, as less than people. And you don't deserve a second chance regardless of whatever you've done. But what society has to understand, is that, unless someone has a life sentence, and even if they have a life sentence, sometimes it gets commuted. But unless you have a life sentence, you have a release date. So now your reentry has to start from the minute that you walk in and that's why it's so important for agencies like ours, agencies like Scott's to be able to do this outreach, to try to reach these other agencies, and these corporations, and try to tell them, look, these gentlemen and these women -- deserve second chances. But now, you also have to speak to the actual justice-involved individual, and they have to realize, that in order for you to change society's view of you -- you have to go out then and you have to prove that if you get the resources and the support that you can be a contributing factor in society. >> Sharif Brown: For instance, my first reentry consumer that I ever worked with in Butner federal Compound, now, is one of the directors of operations for one of the CILs. I have another consumer, that I've been working with, a female, who was incarcerated, in Arizona, who was released at Durham, she's now starting her own business. So, it's all about giving those individuals the opportunity and the support to show society that we can do everything that you're doing, we can be just as important to society, we can contribute just as much, or more -- Than anyone who was not justice-involved because anyone who has been justice-involved, like, Scott had alluded to earlier, has everything stripped away from them. Down to their name. They are no longer a name. Now you're a number. So, now you have to rebuild that self-confidence in them. So they can show society... I can do this. I'm not saying it's going to work with every single individual. It will not. It doesn't matter, how many resources you give an individual, it doesn't matter how many community connections you might give someone. At the end of the day, it comes down to that individual's choice. Whether they want to reoffend or not. But for those individuals who are invested in staying out -- having to run into that barricade of racism in society -- kind of puts them on a defensive, once again, and, makes them not want to try, because, they're deemed, insignificant. And that's where that peer support for wrap-around services comes back in, because, advocacy is one of the things that a Center for Independent Living, has to do. So we can advocate for our justice-involved individuals, when it comes to employment, whether it's a reasonable accommodation; whether it's going down to Social Security Administration office, and just advocating. Because, when societies sees that -- justice-involved individual has support and has an agency behind them that believes in them -- sometimes that will change the perception of those around them. But, it has to start from the outside in. Society and these communities, have to start recognizing that, these individuals that are being released from prison are still people. And they deserve an opportunity, and a second chance to be successful. Just like we would afford those opportunities to anyone of those individuals who might have made a mistake in life. And went to prison. And then came out. So we just have to push through this bias. And this racism that's on the systemic level, and, on a societal level, and once we can do that -- then we're going to start getting more resources, and this reentry and these transitions for the justice-involved individuals, will be a little more streamlined and easier. But that fight is far from over.
So, that's what we need to do to get through this bias and this racism. Whether it be from employment, networks, society, or communities, we have to push through all of it. So Scott, I'm going to bring it to you, (concludes remarks), >> Scott Burlingame : Thank you, so much, Sharif. And -- he nailed it on the head at the beginning there when he said this is an onion with a lot of layers and so I'll take and kind of build off of what Sharif said and I'll add my own as well. And I'll start off by saying when you talk about implicit bias, especially, when you're talking about people who are part of the criminal justice system -- we have to start with our staff as well. And so, if we were going to become a warm and welcoming place, we had to build up the capacity of our staff, to be aware of things. And as I said earlier, it helped a little bit with having a -- you know, a member of our staff, with lived experience, but I think, you know, having -- a safe space, for people to understand, and ask hard questions, and maybe, even sometimes inappropriate questions or maybe sometimes, you know, -- all of a sudden we're talking about we're actively going to find people with -- you know, maybe some -- you know, with felonies, or with maybe violence in their background and things like that.
You know, is they have their biases about that, because we --
our staff are part of society. And we couldn't -- why would we expect them not to? And so really kind of working through a lot of those things. You know, and recognizing the fact also that... you know, We have resources that exist. We -- as I mentioned earlier, we have two Indian reservations in our service area. A majority of the folks who are -- part of our -- local criminal justice system, are maybe, a better way of saying it is a disproportionate amount of people that are part of our local criminal justice system. Are Indigenous people. And so, understanding why, you know -- why does this come from?
What's the background here? What are the stories, and -- and how does that affect... you know, -- >> Scott Burlingame : Their story? And one of the best examples I can give you is -- especially within the addiction community we talk about how, you know, -- and forgive me for a little story I'm going to tell here, because I think it's extraordinarily important is, if -- you look at somebody like a tree, and, you have somebody who is, a tree that's -- plant that's planted in bad soil. And it's sick and not doing well and you uproot it and put it in the new soil and you -- you hope to have that plant do better. And for some people, unfortunately that can be rehab or for other people it can be even a jail system where you can get them away from maybe bad influences. Or -- you know, Whatever trauma that has -- has -- they have lived through. And then you plant them back into the community again but you plant them back in the same dirty soil so one of the things we try to do, as part of our helping people get set up is we try to plant them into fresh soil in the community again. Well -- so that was one of the things we had kind of as a basic part of our framework as we did things. And when we began to talk to people who were part of our local, Native American Communities, they -- had a little bit of problem with that story, because they said, you know, "Don't do that actually we don't want to not be part of the community we were before, because that's culturally important to us." And so we had to look at how we could adapt our services, in order to better-meet the needs of that culture. After getting input back from People who knew that and look at how to may be replace part of the soil, or, I feel like I'm beating that metaphor to death right now but just to look at how to do things slightly differently and the importance of that, and understanding, so much of that, that process. I -- I also think that, you know, we were very deliberate, and training, as I said earlier, we had -- members of our local Tribes come in and do training with us. We had people who work exclusively on the reservations.
Work with us. And we worked on building up our staff's capacity and understanding of how services are different on reservations --
off reservation for Native Americans. We also had -- I like this story because it sounds like it's, you know -- we really went out of our way because we didn't because we're in a small community, so, you know, when our nation had our reckoning a little bit after the tragedy of George Floyd, we -- had, as in many communities, Blacklivesmatter protests and the organizer of that happened to be a friend of mine. Who also happened to work for Another provider, doing the exact same kind of work that we are doing. And so we had him come to our staff meeting. It was in the middle of COVID so it was -- it was by Zoom. But, had him come in and talk about what that meant and how the intersection of everything that was happening at that time, and told his story and, you know, it was extraordinarily effective for our staff, to be able to see the world in a slightly different way and be able to understand things a little bit better. And so we really, really started a lot with our staff, because we needed to be aware and I'm not going to tell you there wasn't uncomfortable times because there were. But it helped. And then beginning to kind of roll into, how do we deal with those issues within the community? >> Scott Burlingame : And how do we -- as a Center for Independent Living -- Do what we do well, embracing and encouraging, what other people do well? In the community? So really being very intentional with showing up, and being part of other activities that are happening with the radical change within our community. And, showing up, so when we have our pride events, we make sure we show up, because we recognize the fact that, you know, people that are part of the -- LGBTQ IA + community also far too often end up as part of the criminal justice system. And far too often end up with addiction and other mental health issues. So how are we there? And how do we learn from that and be, you know, not replace them by any stretch, but be part of them? And also learn from them, in every opportunity that we can. And so, we really we're just un -- are very intentional, with trying to do as much of that as possible. And recognizing the fact that, the answer continues to be on its most simple level that we want people, who -- have disabilities, people with behavioral health issues, not to be part of the criminal justice system. That we want to find healthy communities for them, healthy accessible, affordable communities for them to be part of. You know, building off, again, a little bit about what Sharif said there -- housing -- healthcare -- and employment -- were probably the three biggest issues that, we dealt with, with barriers, and we dealt with barriers because... It's sometimes, easy for people who want to legally discriminate shall we say, To use criminal backgrounds, as a way to do so; so, really talking about, you know, how do we break down those barriers? And, we made some pretty good progress, still. A lot of work to do. Employment is much easier because there's a nationwide worker shortage right now. Employment -- there's been a lot more doors opened up around employment. But, as far as housing goes -- there's still a lot of issues. Still a No. 1 barrier we face, because for so much public housing, felonies still continue to be, you know -- a discrediting factor. And so how do we find safe, affordable, accessible housing -- For people who have been part of the justice system? And working through all of that.
And -- we've had some successes but there's still a lot of work to do there. >> Scott Burlingame : Yeah, so just a lot of different, again -- it's a multilayered issue. (pause), but I think -- oh, I'm sorry, one more thing I'm going to just kind of throw in here and I wanted to say it at some point today, which is, either radical grace, or ugly grace, which is recognizing the fact that we are imperfect humans, both ourselves as staff; and the people we're working with. And when mistakes happen, and when... You know, whether -- when things don't go smoothly, to really practice learning, and to practice forgiveness and to practice not shutting the door, you know, sometimes people relapse, sometimes people do end up back in the criminal justice system. Sometimes staff do things that are, you know, we could have done better, as we're learning and as we're growing into a brand-new program, just continuously and intentionally-learning but also giving people, the grace to make mistakes, because, there's a certain amount of dignity, in making mistakes. And learning from that. And, again, so much of the criminal justice system, does not allow that you screw up, you're revoked, you're back in prison again or back in jail again; and our services aren't built like that. You screw up, you know, we help you out. One final thing: I'm sorry, I just want to also throw in, because I think this is really important when you talk about transition in the community, and -- Is -- unfortunately, people are coming out of the criminal justice system, oftentimes, trying to find houses and oftentimes end up homeless and so we've been very aggressive locally, with homeless providers. In order to be more accepting also because there is some bias within the homeless community and whether or not people... especially people with felonies could be part of that. And so we have been able to actually have our biggest success in that area as we now have a shelter in town, that -- subscribes to the housing first philosophy. And, that has been an absolute game-changer and I -- I don't take credit for that alone, but I will say that our -- five years ago, passed a housing first endorsement if you will and we agreed that we would always support housing first so we began the conversation in our community, well before many others including homeless providers were part of that. So that's the longest answer I've probably given today, it was a lot of different parts, but I think it's probably the most difficult answer that we've had as well. So, with that I'll turn it over to you Tim >> Tim Fuchs: Thanks. Great tips from you both, this is complicated, and multilayered. And I just -- beg of you that if you're going to do this work, that you not ignore this piece. And I -- I hope that doesn't sound condescending but it's really critical to doing this well. All right. Last discussion question, and then we're going to come to the Audience after this one: But, I wanted to just sort of give an opportunity -- we -- sorry, wanted to give an opportunity, to talk about Expanding this work, right? Like, where are you all planning to go next? But also, what are the opportunities that there might be for audience members who are listening and thinking how to build these programs at their CILs, here on slide 11 it says what needs to happen to advance this work? Who might we be missing? And how can we expand this work to be more effective? So Sharif, I'll come back to you for this one >> Sharif Brown: Thank you very much, well, first what ADA is planning on doing with this reentry program, hopefully, is that, we're trying to -- to formulate some kind of systemic change when it comes to how reentry is even addressed when it comes to individuals with disabilities, especially in prisons. So, if we can -- Present the data that shows that the program and the philosophy that we have, that aligns with disability advocates, is, actually, reducing their recidivism rate, our next plan is to bring this to the Governor, and try to have systemic change across the entire state. Now, obviously, if we're able to obtain that, then the next step, obviously, would be national change. That's where ADA is going, as far as what we need to do to advance this kind of work, formats like this, are fantastic opportunities, for individuals across the Nation, to get a -- a peep-hole view of what we're doing as far as trying to change reentry. It also opens up the opportunity for conversations, for partnerships, with other -- other agencies that might want to connect as far as any individual agency locally, who wants to do something. Like I alluded to earlier, I would say just try to get into the prisons. As fast as you possibly can. On any level. It will be volunteer work, so it's not a situation of where you have to pay the jails to go into the prisons to work. It will be volunteer. But, it's all about -- I would say understanding, like, Scott had alluded to earlier, that the individuals that are coming out, do need resources. And they do need, assistance, And we do have to give them that dignity of risk of allowing them to make their mistakes, but supporting them, in their decisions. And letting them know what Option A B, and C, are going to allude or conclude to if they decide to take those options. That's dignity of risk, and every individual that's alive, has those same choices, every day, in their daily life. So it's only right that we afford that same opportunity. >> Sharif Brown: It's about empathy and not sympathy. Individuals that are being released from prison they don't want sympathy, they don't want, oh, we're so sorry this happened to you. They just want someone who understands. From society. That, a lot of individuals that are justice-involved, especially on a federal level, a lot of those individuals probably committed a crime, when they were 18 years old. You know, just not thinking, being impulsive like we all were at that age and now you're sitting in federal prison for 40 or 50 years so that one mistake, threw your whole life out of the way, it's just about having understanding, about empathy. It's about outreach, because there are so few resources out there, and Scott knows this firsthand. There are so many few resources out there, for justice-involved individuals. Because, most of the time, most companies and corporations just don't want to get involved. And sometimes you have to stand up and you have to scream at the top of your lungs -- for someone to recognize what you're trying to do! But if you can get that one person to notice the change, you don't -- you have no idea, what connections that one person has with other individuals; so it's about just having these connections. It's about doing, the hard grass work that sometimes, will cause difficult situations with other corporations and agencies, but for you to advocate, successfully, for someone -- you have to be prepared to have those difficult conversations. And you have to try to get these resources, you have to turn over every single stone that you can.
And then, of course, everything comes back to funding, because without any funding, there will be no resources. So, go speak to your local politician. Go speak to your local Congressman about reentry, and about the need, and about the want of the -- of society, and your community to want to embrace individuals that are coming out of prison to give them a second chance. When I present to individuals about my Butner experience, I always ask them the same -- I guess wheel of fortune/ "jeopardy" question and I ask them, do they have any idea how many individuals are being released from Butner federal compound into the triangle area? And that's essentially Raleigh Durham area, and -- it's 1,800 people a year, that are being released fraught Butner back into the Triangle, so you have to get ahead of these individuals being released and give them some kind of reentry services so this way when they get out, they're already somewhat acclimated. People have to understand -- it is easy for individuals who are not involved in this reentry program or have no history as far as being justice-involved. You think about how much technology has changed in the past ten years. Imagine the past 20 years. A lot of individuals that are going into prison and are doing these long decade 30-40-year numbers, some of them have never even seen a smartphone before. So small things like that, that can be so overwhelming for them, when they get out. But for us, who live on the outside, picking up an iPhone 12, or 13, or whatever the number is now -- is easy for us.
I tell people this story, I had an individual that was being released from Butner, he did 32 years. And myself, and my first reentry consumer, we trained this individual on how to use a smartphone. And, he was so institutionalized, that the first thing that he asked the phone was -- What food were they serving in his prison that he just got released from? So this goes to show you the mindset. So we have to try to give individuals these resources before they get released. Because once someone gets released, essentially their reentry is already three quarters of the way over and you have to start playing catchup, you start to get proactive and get into the prisons and help the individuals prior to them being released. Because one day the individuals that are justice-involved could be your neighbor. And if we're not giving people the resources, and someone gets out, and, they're hungry, or they have no shelter -- they are only going to reoffend and it could be you they're reoffending guest, we have to understand we have to start giving these people, the justice-involved individuals, the correct resources and the correct connections, to these community partners, that are going to support them with their reentry.
So that's what we need to do is to try to expand this whole reentry program on a national level. So, Scott, I will come to you with that one >> Scott Burlingame : You know, thank you, so much. It was actually something I was going to talk about on bias but it fits here as well. Which is, be aware, too, of, you know, people -- and, again, I --
Sharif deals more with prisons I tend to deal more with jails, or we tend to deal more with jails on our team. But keep in mind that, you know -- mental health is -- oftentimes the reason why people end up in those situations. Not always, but the high percentage of people that are involved in that process, have some sort of mental health issue. So -- and including... Seeing addiction as a mental health issue. We did a survey at one point, and -- again, Tim pointed out earlier, we're a very red area so maybe this affects and skews it a little bit, but something, like, 410 people didn't believe addiction was a mental health issue and so when you're dealing with that as part of your baseline, again, that's going to be one of the things that as you're talking about disability awareness, you know, Going in to -- and walking into -- the fact that, if we talk about mental health. If we talk about disability inclusion, if we talk about.... Deinstitutionalization, That, we have to work with persons who are -- in the criminal justice system. And are oftentimes, institutionalized. And I think that -- that that's extraordinarily important. We -- I would really encourage you to pay attention to, if you want to be -- you may not need to advance it at the beginning stages, with necessarily direct service. In fact, I would say that's kind of -- that's maybe getting the cart in front of the horse a little bit if you just say, you know, we want to help ten people this year, get out of -- out of jail, and transition into the community. I would, actually, not suggest that. What I would rather say is look at it first as a systemic advocacy issue for your center and say, we want to pay attention to who in our community, is dealing with, criminal justice reform. Or we want to deal with, who in our community, is dealing with, helping people transition out of the community. And we want to invite them in for conversations. And we want to listen to them. Or we want to find out who -- where can we go? And Sharif talked about this and it's absolutely true we go -- preCOVID, we would go into jails and do -- stripped down versions of independent living classes in the jails and develop relationships with people and listen to them. And have conversations with them, And -- and find out what it means for your individual community. And what does that look like? Because, we probably can't be cookie-cutters of either what independence does, or what Sharif does, but what -- how can you build in your community, with the resources you -- that are there, and where the needs are, within your community, In order to make it work? And really be deliberate with that process, and -- give yourself time to answer those questions, And recognize you can't do everything. You're not going to solve the problems yourself.
But you can -- or all the problems yourself, but you can begin to solve some of the problems yourself, and really to be as deliberate as possible with that. The other thing is, I agree, too, with what Sharif said -- is, change the narrative on addiction. On the criminal justice system. We had a -- we showed a movie here, a while back, that was really about changing the narrative around addiction. And, I had, five people on stage -- so we showed the movie.
And then we had five people onstage with me, and I was -- myself and five other people, so I was the only one onstage, that had never been -- that was not a convicted felon. And we had people, that were -- we had a minister. . And, you know, college students, and, professionals, and, things like that. We had -- this list of people, we had a -- a -- a elected official. Who had been part of the criminal justice system. Who has spent time in jail. Who are living in long-term recovery. And we flipped the script from the image that so much of society says, about people with mental health issues, and says about people who have been part of the criminal justice system and we were intentional with that. And it's extraordinarily hard, the shame factor that often comes along with both being justice-involved and being a person with a disability; and being a person who has struggled with addiction -- Is a lot. And, you know, it can be extraordinarily hard but if you can flip that script as your center and as your community, and you don't have to do it alone, go out and find other people. I was recently at a -- Event for another nonprofit, and they had somebody stand up, and tell her story, and she talked about how, you know, she was released from jail in a time before Independence was involved in this. Just -- And, had no services, and ended up going to this nonprofit. The nonprofit helped her out. She went back to school. She got her social work degree, and now she's helping other people. And like, those stories are wonderful, and -- that goes -- just so important to, like, the be unapologetic and flipping the script about all of these things. And talking about how people can succeed in raising the level of expectations for folks. So... just by really getting engaged and being unapologetic, is disorderarily extraordinarily important, those I think are some of the things, >> Tim Fuchs: Thanks so much you-all, all right, that is it for our discussion questions and now we're going to open it up to you-all, let me remind you all of the different ways you can ask questions. If you're on Zoom and the Zoom Q&A tab is accessible to you, that's a great way to submit questions. You can find that right in your Zoom menu bar at the bottom of your screen, if that's not accessible or convenient for you, you're welcome to e-mail your questions to me at tim@NCIL.org, that's tim@NCIL.org.
And if those options aren't available to you or you're only on a telephone today you can press star 9, on your telephone keypad, and that will indicate that you have a question and I'll come to your line. So let's start with some of the questions that have come in during the presentation. >> Tim Fuchs: And, I think, early on, we had a participant who asked, you know, can -- can this also be directed to locations or facilities, with at-risk -- at-risk youth, with disabilities as well? And they go on to provide some examples about why they think that would work in their community. And, I'll take a -- a first-response to this and then, if you all Scott and Sharif have anything to add, you're welcome to. >> Tim Fuchs: You know, absolutely -- absolutely. Right? I think what we are trying to do, today, is present two trail-blazing programs that are excellent models for people, considering this work or interested in this work that want to see how it can be done, but one of the things, going back to the earliest stages of putting this training together was to try to reframe transition, and diversion. Right? So the institutional or congregate transition and diversion core services, for CILs. And then thinking beyond, as Sharif talked about in his very first response today -- beyond that kind of, like, community nursing home, binary, you know, that, like, there are a lot of people that are in unsafe, unstable unfair, housing or congregate settings, That don't meet that nursing home community binary, And, a lot of those folks, are trapped in the criminal-legal system. So as you-all listen today, and as you-all think about what might work for your CIL, for your community, for people with disabilities, living in -- in these settings, you know, it might be a -- a juvenile program. Right? A juvenile justice program, it might be, a psychiatric ward. In a local hospital. It might be, whatever. Right? An example I can't think of right now in the moment. So please, think about this broadly. And think about, like, to the language from the last question, who are we missing? Who's not getting support now? Maybe start there, and work backwards. Scott, and Sharif, anything to add on that one? >> Sharif Brown: Yeah, I want to say definitely, if you can get to the youth before they get to that point to where they're doing, decades of incarceration then absolutely. If you can stop that train from rolling before it gets started, do so. One of my guys I work with, at Butner, he's been incarcerated since he was 17 years old, imagine if someone had the wherewithal or at least the foresight to step in and not necessarily shelter the individual but give some kind of support. Let them know, like, you know, there are other resources out there, other things you can do with your team, than being in the streets, and doing illegal activities, which led to his 55-year incarceration. So, if you have the opportunity to pretty much divert an individual from going down that path, then, yes, you try to do all that you can, and be proactive instead of being reactive. Because once someone gets involved in the criminal justice system, now most everything else is going to be reactive now. Because they didn't have anyone to step in beforehand. So, yes, if you have the opportunity, to help out an individual and every Center for Independent Living knows, we don't have an age requirement. There are no age restrictions. So, if you can help someone who it 10, 11, 12 years old that might be a troubled youth going in the wrong direction, if you have in the capacity in your program to do so, then absolutely do so. Or, you wait, and then you have to deal with them ten years down the line when they're doing real numbers, and you're going to be wishing that you could have stepped in. So, yes, if you can be proactive, it's always better to be proactive than reactive. That's just how I feel. (Pause), >> Scott Burlingame : Yeah, and I agree with everything that's been said so far, and I think it's a good opportunity, to -- kind of step back as a center, and -- one of the beauties of centers for independent living is that we each get to be -- we have a lot of local control and if we have our -- our kind of core services but there's a lot of -- Freedom within that to serve our needs of our individual communities; so, find out what you can do best, and let it be a little bit of a -- experiment, in how to best do independent living within whatever community you're coming from. And if you can find a better way to do things, a better way to achieve outcomes, do it. And if it doesn't work adjust, it's okay, I mean, but just really do that, and, yeah, absolutely, I agree, too, when you talk more specifically about the question. Yeah, dealing with youth, is extraordinarily important. If you can prevent people -- and, you know, provide them with -- with -- alternatives, that are for a healthy community for them going forward, it's the right thing to do so, yes, absolutely. Back to you, Tim! >> Tim Fuchs: Great. Thanks. So, Sharif, how has COVID-19 impacted your program? What have you been able to do? Not do? What's that look like for you-all? >> Sharif Brown: Well, like Scott had alluded to preCOVID we were able to go into the facilities and, actually, sit down, with our consumers, and preCOVID, the -- the model for the Butner program is that we would meet an individual consumer 16 months before his release date. And then we would essentially compile and construct the IRP, which stands for "individualized reentry plan." And then we would work through that plan, so, if someone has a reading deficiency, or things like that -- we would essentially increase their reading level. Over the next 16 months. We would do mock job interviews in those 16 months. We would do rÃ©sumÃ©-writing, cover-letter-writing, just certain things, whatever barrier they think that they have to help them with their independence is what we're going to degrees, whatever it might be. Obviously, anything that's not legal, we're not going to touch that part of it. But any kind of independent living skill that we can strengthen, or teach, to help them with their reentry when they get out. We're going to do that. And we were doing that preCOVID.
Now, post COVID, obviously, that's not any kind of face to face interaction; however, the great thing with the IRP is that, we can construct -- my agency can construct an IRP, without, actually, having to physically see someone. We had a system in place, where, we extract the information, from that Consumer, and then we construct the IRP. And then, we send the IRP back into the prison so that consumer can review the IRP, give them enough time to ask any questions, about anything that they're not clear about. Or, they want to edit it. They can send it back. That gives the team enough time to tweak it and then send it back in and we're also sending in a satisfaction survey because we want to make sure that the work that we're doing is viable, to that consumer. And the only way we're going to know is to get feedback. So, because -- COVID, we can't see anyone, that's how we're doing all of our interaction. Unless that justice-involved Consumer is being released to the five counties and then now we can do post -- we can do prerelease IRP and post release IRP for wrap-around services and full support. So, COVID might have slowed things down, but it's never going to stop what we're doing, at ADA. We're going to keep trying to find ways to communicate, trying to find ways to help our consumers the best way that we possibly can, when that's sending in SSI applications, food stamp applications, giving them information to -- where they can get their I.D. from. How much it costs. A lot of individuals that are incarcerated, do not have their vital records, Social Security card, birth certificate, they don't have any of that and might not even know how to obtain that. So these are some of the things that go into an IRP. That's why it's individualized. So anything that they want, on their reentry plan they can benefit them, community services, faith-based services, mental health services, substance abuse, independent living skills -- the agency covers all of that and if we can't do it ourselves, we have a list of connections and partners that we know we can refer them to, across the State. Once they get out. So, Post -- preCOVID, face to face, post COVID, all essentially paperwork being sent in. But, the work is still viable. And, obviously, once they open the prisons back up, then we will reconvene, with the face to faces, and that's going to, obviously, make a better connection, with the agency, and the -- the population that we're serving. So I hope that answered the question, to whoever presented that question >> Tim Fuchs: That's great. Yeah. Thanks. So, Scott, somebody asked: How -- how can we work through this problem that we see in housing? Where, you know, folks are being denied housing, because of their criminal record. But we need to help them find housing? So this person mentions the clean slate program. But I'm wondering if you have any other experience or tips there >> Scott Burlingame : I do have -- a tip, and, again, this is going to take some -- a little bit of a community thing, and/or somebody with some money. In North Dakota, there's -- statewide, and then a couple of cities, have also adopted, a landlord mitigation program, which, It sort of bonds people, so if I'm a person with a bad rental history, And you, as a landlord wouldn't normally rent to me, an agency can agree, to.... Ensure -- a consumer, And -- and the way it would work, so, again, this goes back to -- I have a bad, rental history, and you're working at an agency that's part of the landlord mitigation program. What I agree to is that, I'll enter into the program. And, what I agree to, is that I will have -- well, preCOVID face to face, post COVID phone call or Zoom -- communication with you on a monthly basis, from time to time, maybe, I'll come in, I'll also -- sign a release of information that will say you can have contact with my landlord at any time. And, for the next year, we'll follow up with you, in order to make sure that, you know, my needs are being met -- That, I -- I don't have any concerns, I don't have any issues, and things like that. And if by chance, during that year, I decide to either withdraw from the Program, or, I decide to, you know, throw a big party, invite all of you people from all over the country to come to my party and it's a lot of fun, and then leave -- that the landlord mitigation program will actually pay for any damages that are done to the apartment. And so that's been extraordinarily successful. I can tell you that, again, it's not -- (laughing) it has paid out a few insurance claims but it's been very, very few, I think it was about two and a half years into it before the first claim was actually filed. Because most people, when you can provide them with that ongoing support, and they understand that, you know, things are -- and, again, COVID's changed things but it used to be, like, I'm going -- you're going to come by my apartment maybe once a month and just visit so I would better not have 300 people over there, at that time. But really, kind of helping people with the case management if you will, in order to do it; so that's been a program. And so it's worth death both because state put aside money for it, and then, community foundations and other communities have put aside money for it. And, yeah, it's absolutely -- that's been a suggestion, in order to do that. Again, it's called a landlord mitigation program in North Dakota. So... >> Tim Fuchs: Really interesting concept. That is very cool, never heard of that. Thanks Scott. All right. Let's see, we got time for maybe one more question here, so -- and I apologize, we won't be able to get to all of these, somebody asked would it be a good start to use our certified peer specialist program to include, former inmates to take the lead and work the county level to acquire grant funding? And yeah heard Sharif say he has certified peer specialists on his team, that would be a great way to start small and begin to do this work. I think maybe have them, start building the program and then look for -- (interruption in audio). [STAND BY FOR LIVE CAPTIONS]. Sharif: I think we lost him so just to piggyback on what Tim was saying as far as peer support, yes, if you have the opportunity to have justice involved individuals, spearhead your program as far as peer support goes. I think that would be a great opportunity, due to the fact that they have that lived experience. So, yeah,. Try to pick their brain, think about or ask them what they needed for their reentry, because a lot of times, what you're going to notice, especially when you get deep into this work, the majority of the individuals that are looking for reentry services, are going to want most of the same things.
They're going to want the same resources, housing, employment, Whether it's faith-based services any kind of links to the community, a lot of times, transportation, Is also one of the main things that people will be asking for, because, you figure, how much transportation has changed in the last five to ten years. And a lot of the individuals have never rode the bus before for some of these rural areas that we're serving. So, yes, if you have the opportunity to bring to someone who has that lived experience, not necessarily to spearhead to try to get the grant because when it comes to grant writing, it's a lot of lingo and language, that has to be utilized that someone might not necessarily know how to do; so, if you're going to bring someone to try to obtain a grant, then, yes, you can have, someone who has that peer support lived experience spear-headed, but you might want to bring in someone, who knows how to actually write the grants, to be able to assist you with obtaining that grant, once you get to that level; so, I hope that answered, I hope that answered whoever's question that was. (A pause), Scott Burlingame : I don't know if Tim is back yet or if it's working because the joys of computers, but I will just add, I just wanted to add one more question here because I saw one. That, I think, is -- is very appropriate, right now, which is can faith-based agencies be of help? And absolutely. I think that that's extraordinarily important. I think that spirituality can and oftentimes is -- An important part of helping people to establish healthy communities. I think that, you know, again, going back to implicit bias you need to make sure you check yourself at that issue, and also sometimes that you may be, hold them accountable as well to make sure that they're not intentionally or unintentionally being biased against the people that you're trying to serve. But, they are -- very -- in fact, right before I hopped on this call, I had a pastor reach out to me, who is -- you know, providing services to people, and wanting to know how she can partner with Independence and I want to partner with her, because if that helps somebody stay out of an institution, I'm on board with it. So, yeah, (A pause), >> Brooke Curtis: Hi, everyone, this is Brooke Curtis, associate director of training and publications, I think that Tim might be having some technical difficulties, so. >> Tim Fuchs: Can you hear me Brooke? >> Brooke Curtis: Yes, we can hear you now. >> Tim Fuchs: It finally happened. It finally happened. >> Brooke Curtis: I'll turn things over to you then. >> Tim Fuchs: 17 months into the pandemic and I finally lost Internet, during a webinar, Sorry about that everybody, but I'm reconnected now. Anyway, as Brooke was saying we're at time. Sharif and Scott, I can't thank you, all, enough, just an outstanding presentation. Really, innovative work that you-all are doing, I'm so thankful that you-all are doing this work, and that you're willing to take your time. To share your -- your expertise and your experience with us today. I hope that you-all will -- will engage in this work. I know that it's a bit daunting.
Remember that this is not just a training program, it's also a technical assistance program. So if you want to reach out, after today's webinar, and ask questions, please do. We're here to help, you can always reach me at tim@NCIL.org.
And don't forget: Two things 1), this webinar will be archived so you can review it, or share it with colleagues, it will be up on ILRU,'s Web site at ILRU.org within 48 hours. And also when I close the webinar in just a moment, the evaluation form will open up on your screen, and hope you take a minute to fill it out. Sorry we're a couple of minutes over, and that we had technical issues, hope you have a great afternoon, and we'll talk to you soon, bye! (Concludes), \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \* \*

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