

EN ESSENTIALS TRANSCRIPT

Connecting the Dots when serving Youth and Young Adults

October 9, 2024

Derek Shields: Welcome to today's EN Essential Session, Connecting the Dots when serving Youths and Young Adults. If we could forward the slide, please. Thank you. Back to the previous one, please. My name is Derek Shields, and I will serve today as your moderator. If this is your first EN Essential Session, welcome. Please know that these sessions are designed for content for individuals seeking to enhance Employment Networks performance and compliance.

Today we will focus on a learning event to build upon some of the initial EN Foundations ideas with those training modules and focus on some new resources, best practice strategies, and other helpful information. Specifically, today we are focusing on youths and young adults, and supporting the theme of October's National Disability Employment Awareness Month, Accessing Good Jobs for All. So, we celebrate NDEAM and recognize this theme and including the next generation of workers, youths and young adults who will enter the workforce workers with disabilities.

Let us review today's overview and agenda, and also a few housekeeping items. To help set the stage for our topic today, we will be using our most recently published Ticketholder success story, connecting the dots for Adrian. Here on the screen, we have a picture of Adrian, and it is important to know that this EN Essentials is about Adrian's success story, but not exactly just about sharing the success story. It is about a focus on the relationships between all the organizations that supported Adrian and how they work together to help her and other individuals like her to succeed in work. You should come away from today's session with a sense of how to build similar relationships and why it is important and valuable for ENs and other community partners and potential funding sources to support both youths and young adults like Adrian. Let's move to the next slide, please, and I'll cover our agenda.

For today's agenda, I'm going to cover some logistics as we normally do. Then I'll announce our panelists. I'm going to describe Adrian's story in a little bit more detail, then we're going to go through some key supports and relationships. This will help set the stage for our panel. Then we're going to have our featured guests, our panel, join us for a session titled Working Together for Success. This is specifically around serving youths and young adults. And then we'll have a Q&A session at the end where you could bring your questions to the panelists. Now that we've covered the agenda, let's move forward to our logistics for the event.

First, TPM is recording and capturing the transcript from today's meeting, and we'll make it available on the Your Ticket to Work website at EN Essentials Learning Events, we have a link here on the page. Next, please remember that per the Ticket Program Agreement, part 3,

section 11, subsection I, EN staff are not reported to record this meeting nor capture the transcript. When considering questions, please feel free to ask your questions in the MS Teams chat section. We do ask that you to refrain from answering questions in the chat that are intended for TPM or SSA staff. Let those folks handle that please. If you do have additional questions during the event you can always send those to enoperations@yourtickettowork.ssa.gov and we'll be able to route those to the individuals for a response.

Next, closed captioning is available for participants who use MS Teams application or by using the closed caption link provided in the GovDelivery announcement and in the chat. To turn on closed captions in MS Teams, go to the three ellipses at the top of the MS Teams window, please click on more, scroll down the list to select language and speech, and then you can click to turn on live captions. When using the link option, please paste that link in the browser of your choice and it will open a separate window to view those closed captions. Okay, next slide please.

As I mentioned, my name is Derek Shields, I work with the Ticket Program Manager as the Senior EN Development and Training Manager, and I will be serving as a moderator and presenting some content, as I mentioned to set the stage for today's session. With that in mind, I would also like to acknowledge several individuals that helped us prepare for today's session, including Jayme Pendergraft and Kimberly Childs from our communications and outreach team. And Tammy Liddicoat, our Manager of Partner Relations. And now let's please move to the next slide so I can review our panelists.

On this slide, we're pleased to have with us today four individuals that were key to the successful transition from school to work for Adrian. With us from Community Integrated Services is Paul Barth, a Project Search Manager. We also have Shari Brightful with us today. Shari is the District Administrator for the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Also with Community Integrated Services is Angelina Bush. Angelina is the Assistant Director of the Ticket Program and Benefits. And our fourth and final panelist that will be joining us in a little bit is Jane Cordero. Jane is a Special Education Coordinator with the Philadelphia School District. I'm excited to have the panelists with us, but before we have them join, as I mentioned, we're going to go through a few key elements that will help set the stage. Let's move forward two slides to review Adrian's story.

So again, here's a picture of Adrian on the slide, and she's sitting at a desk smiling and we want to tell you how she got to where she is with her work story. Adrian is a young woman living with autism spectrum disorder and she was preparing to graduate from high school. And like other students with disabilities in the K through 12 school system, Adrian had access to a variety of services and program supports, including therapeutic interventions, special education, and other supports, unfortunately that go away, right? And these programs would end as she approached age 21. This brought a sense of uncertainty certainly to her family. And her parents were uncertain how best to help Adrian in that transition period of loving care and support to lead to that full and robust life that Adrian envisioned for herself. And of course, her parents too. They were looking for post-graduation advice from a counselor. And they sought that advice from a school guidance counselor. Next slide, please.

This is where the dots start connecting. Adrian's guidance counselor discussed the available programs that could provide individualized supports for her around workforce readiness, and specifically for the job that she was seeking and a career success pathway. The counselor connected Adrian with Pennsylvania's state Vocational Rehabilitation agency to learn more about work and all the services that would be available to her. One thing was clear in this case, Adrian wanted to work and wanted a job and a career just like other students with disabilities and other students that were graduating. Now, naturally, her parents had some concerns, including the risk about losing her Supplemental Security Income and her Medicaid benefits, which of course are critical.

This is when the next connection occurred when the vocational rehabilitation counselor connected Adrian to Community Integrated Services, the EN that is with us today. And this is where benefits counseling came in helping her navigate the path to employment. Next slide, please.

Speaking of connecting to employment, this is where the Community Integrated Services or CIS team came in. And Adrian learned that if she were employed, her Medicaid could continue, even if her earnings became too substantial for her to receive a monthly SSI payment. Adrian then worked with the CIS staff to explore jobs and ways to gain those skills through work experience. And the staff connected her with staff at her high school to learn more about a school-to-work transition program called Project SEARCH. This offers technical assistance, training and experiential learning, and a host of business internships. So, the connections have led now from school to state vocational rehabilitation to an Employment Network, CIS, then back to school to Project SEARCH, which is connecting Adrian to an employer. So, when we think about connecting the dots, here are the dots, and these are many of the players that we have with us today for our panel. Next slide, please.

Looking to the job, after connecting with Project SEARCH, Adrian received technical training and gained work experience and learned those soft skills that were needed at the Philadelphia International Airport. She was an intern there and there she demonstrated her work ethic and really was an organized individual. And this organizational skill was an asset there, and she was able to help coworkers on a variety of projects. From that, she was offered and accepted a full-time position as a departmental aide at the Airport's Human Resources Office. And she works there today, and she has the benefits of being a city employee and proudly ended up trading the SSI benefit for a paycheck.

And I should note that Adrian is working today. Both Adrian and her father who helped with the success story framing and the production of that latest success story were invited to join us. And Adrian declined because she is at work and prefers to be working today, which I would make mention that that's what this is all about. So, we congratulate Adrian on her job and her career, and the rest of us are here today to talk about how we can make this happen in a rippling effect to bring work opportunities to more people. Speaking of that if we could go to the next slide.

I'm now going to turn for a few minutes to review some key supports in relationships that make success stories like this possible. Next slide, please.

To start, let's look at the five key areas and we'll talk about these supports in relationships in more detail. To achieve those good outcomes, we want to have access to integrated services that begin before transition and continue after jobs are secured. So, then job retention is possible, and then people start thinking about not just a job, but a career. So, we will look at family support, school transition services, vocational rehabilitation, benefits counseling, and community support services. Let's move to the next slide now to look at family support.

Of course, parents, guardians, and other family members play a significant role in helping children prepare for adulthood and high expectations can support future goals by helping the youths or young adults link to important resources that start to frame a mindset that all can work and all have access to good jobs and good careers.

On this slide, we have a list of six areas where family can start framing that high expectations can be supported through benefits counseling, through career planning, through employment counseling, through money management, and understanding finance and financial management through training. Then of course, networking to find mentors, including peer mentors that are role models, perhaps with the same or similar disabilities who are working. Connecting into self-advocacy and learning opportunities so individuals can live the self-determinant lives that we all desire to have. Family members need guidance too. And of course, some of these could be available too, mentoring opportunities for family members to understand how they best can support their children in transition too. All right, so that's family supports. Let's move to the next slide and we'll examine school supports.

Students with disabilities need access to integrated services that begin in school, again before transition. This can start with individualized education programming and individualized education plans. These plans should include goals and that transition pathway for after high school. And this can include further education and training of course, but it could also include where to live, employment, leisure, recreational activities, and potentially transportation training and solutions as well to access community and employment opportunities. And from my personal experience, having youths and young adults with disabilities creating and delivering presentations on their own individualized education plans can be the greatest asset in determining their self-advocacy strengths in delivering the message about how they desire to transition to work in careers, just like all other peers. The team behind this includes special education teachers, guidance counselors, therapists, and supporting agencies that are available to the school. And of course, we're lucky to have a special education resource with us today from the Philadelphia School District. Let's go to the next slide, please.

When we turn to benefits counseling, the third resource that we're looking at today, it's important to note that benefit counselors help youths and families understand how work will impact their benefits. This could include reviewing the financial and health insurance options, which are of course primary concern to significant influencers like family members. They can also help navigate the complex systems that exist, assist with reporting requirements, and describe and help access Work Incentives available through Social Security to provide the flexibilities needed to transition from support services and benefits to gainful employment. Again, we must start early here before the age of 18, and that can include accessing Work Incentives Planning and Assistance, or WIPA projects who are able to prioritize youths in their

services beginning at the age of 14. If you are not aware of that, again, WIPAs have the ability to prioritize youths beginning at the age of 14. And it's important to also acknowledge that big changes happen at the age of 18 when people who receive SSI benefits go through a redetermination process. And this is when Social Security will determine whether a disability is severe enough to limit the ability to work at a specific level. With those pressures to the family members, and to the individual themselves, benefits counselors are available to help individuals who are approaching 18 with a disability to understand the current benefit situation and options that are available around employment transition, but also food, housing, Medicaid, and other changes that could occur. It's very important to focus on the benefit counseling supports. Let's now move to the next slide, please.

When we speak of benefits counseling, it of course leads to benefits. And for more on benefits, it's important to access Social Security's youth website, for youths ages 14 to 17, their guardians, and in this case, that would've been Adrian's parents, along with teachers and other key influencers about national services, programs and resources that are available. And this could set people up to figure out how to appeal or continue receiving payments if eligibility stops due to that age 18 redetermination process. How earnings affect that age 18 redetermination and how changes to income considerations after turning 18 may occur. The benefits can also include the Work Incentives that are available to use. And also, the SSI program rules about higher education funds and learning more about Achieving a Better Life Accounts or ABLE accounts that allow people to save without impacting their benefits or longer-term planning process. Now, it is important to acknowledge that some youths do not begin receiving benefits until their parents' income is not subjected to deeming. And, honestly, this is not an area of my expertise, but we wanted to bring it up today because this is what benefits counselors are available to assist with. And remember, they're available to assist in transition services beginning at the age of 14. If we can prioritize these supports, we can assist more youth and young adults in preparing for transition to successful work. Okay, and with that, let's proceed to the next slide.

And we turn now to Vocational Rehabilitation. This is the second to last area that I will cover. When we speak about VR supports and services, we look at an early engagement opportunity as early as age 14. Here we can collaborate with the IEP or the Individualized Education Program team, including the educators, employers, and partner agencies around two different areas - pre-employment and post-employment services. Pre-employment or pre-ETS can focus again on those self-advocacy skills that are critical and also workplace readiness and job exploration, work-based learning experiences, vocational or post-secondary training and education, and the all-important job search and placement process. Once employment begins, of course, Vocational Rehabilitation can continue to support post-employment services through supported and customized employment models and also with the consecutive services of Partnership Plus, where once a case closes, then a Ticket can transfer from VR to an EN for those ongoing support services, including potentially job coaching for job retention support.

And on the final slide of this section, we move to community services. And with community services, we have providers that focus on transition age youths. And many of these entities are Employment Networks or make good Employment Networks, and they include Centers for Independent living, CILs, of which we have many in the program, focused through mandatory

requirement on transition age youth. We also have employment service providers through Community Rehabilitation Programs or Supported Employment agencies. Of course, our Workforce agencies and career centers, including the American Job Centers, have supports for youths in transition. And we find commonly that mental health service providers are doing excellent work in transition age youths supports, considering that employment or transition to work can be part of a recovery plan. And last, we have college and university disability services offices, which sometimes become the glue. The glue that exists between the career center, which may not be experts in disability employment, and the reasonable accommodations program supports and potentially the disability student led organization on campus where these three entities can come together to work with other partners, including VR and Employment Networks in finding transition opportunities for youths and young adults with disabilities coming out of our colleges and universities. We have a lot of resources out there that are key partners that are the dots in this theme that we have today of working together to support youths and young adults with disabilities as they consider transition to jobs and work.

And if we move to the next slide, it's now time to transition to our panel, which we're really excited today to focus on working together in support of youths and young adults with disabilities to find work. At this point, I would like to proceed to the next slide, to first focus on the Employment Network that helped us pull all this together. Thank you. So here again, we welcome today Community Integrated Services, an Employment Network that works to build a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable workforce through partnerships with public agencies, businesses, schools, universities, and community organizations. And with that, they organize their work into the Ticket to Work Program, of which we have one of those leaders with us today who also is responsible for benefits counseling. And then they have customized employment and supported employment models, and also a focus on school to work transition. And we're lucky to have their Project SEARCH project manager with us today as well. At this time, what we're going to do is ask our panelists to turn on their cameras and audio, and we're going to drop the slide here so we can have better access to our panelists. And I welcome Angelina Bush, Jane Cordero, Shari Brightful, and Paul Barth to today's EN Essential Session. And we have them all up now, so it's fantastic.

And what we'd like to do is now transition away from the training portion into getting to know each of our panelists a little bit more specifically about what they do in their positions. And I'm going to start by asking about your role and what does your agency do in supporting Adrian to consider and pursue work? And I'd like to ask Angelina, who is the Assistant Director of the Ticket Program and Benefits with CIS to start us off. Angelina, first and foremost, thanks for all of your help in coordinating and organizing today's EN Essentials panel. We appreciate that. But please take a few minutes, introduce yourself and explain the role you provided in support of Adrian's success story.

Angelina Bush: Thanks Derek. Hi everyone. And as Derek already introduced me a little bit, my name's Angelina Bush and I work for Community Integrated Services. We are a national Employment Network, but we do focus a lot of our efforts on our local area, which is Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. I oversee both our benefits counseling and our Ticket to Work Programs at CIS. I'm certainly excited to be here today with my colleague as well as some of our partners who have been instrumental in Adrian's success. What my role,

specifically with Adrian, has been is providing benefits counseling to allow her and dad and mom to understand how her benefits would be impacted with working, as well as connecting the dots with the transition from using OVR, which is the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. And then moving that over to an Employment Network through the Ticket to Work Program. I think I'll speak a bit more about that later. But I'm going to pass this over to Jane.

Jane Cordero: Hi, good afternoon, everyone. My name is Jane Cordero. I work for the School District of Philadelphia, and I am a special education and transition specialist in our district. And I work in Philadelphia. So, it is a large urban district that serves thousands of students of transition age. And I was instrumental in the role with Adrian specifically in helping connect her from her school programming into Project SEARCH, which is the program that helped her bridge the gap and that transition year from leaving school services to her adult life. And the school that I work through serves as the LEA - the Local Education Administrator for Project SEARCH and three other offsite school-to-work transition programs that we have in our district.

Derek Shields: Thank you.

Jane Cordero: I'll kick it off to Shari Brightful.

Shari Brightful: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Shari Brightful, and I am the Manager for the Philadelphia Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Our offices, for individuals who are residents of Philadelphia County, I have one of the best roles ever in this collaboration. I get to supervise the staff who help support a lot of these connections. But the thing that I love the most is that I get to collaborate with a lot of the individuals on this call to make sure that we have services and providers and individuals who can support these opportunities so that our youth can grow and be able to maintain the independence that they so much would like to have. And I will pass it off to Paul.

Paul Barth: Thanks, Shari. Hello everyone. My name is Paul Barth. I am the manager of Project SEARCH Programs for Community Integrated Services. When I worked with Adrian, I was a skills trainer for our Project SEARCH at Drexel program, so that's a, basically like a job coach. And I worked with her from everything from travel training to everyday in Project SEARCH. And then on the other end, once she was employed, helping her get travel training, get set up for her actual working job.

Derek Shields: Thanks Paul. Thanks everyone for providing the introductions so people have a frame of reference of the nature of the work that you do on a daily basis, and then how that connected into support Adrian. So now it's time that we can dive in a little deeper into each of these roles and learn from you and potentially help some of our audience today develop a few questions for you. They might learn about how to replicate what you all might be doing in their region. Let's go back to the school district because this is where it all starts. This is where our talent is sourced out of for young people that are looking at graduation, how are we going to help transition them as we did with Adrian, but also for many others that want that. Jane, when looking at the school district, can you speak a little bit more to transition planning for your students and the community based opportunities that are offered to students?

Jane Cordero: Absolutely. As you've discussed in the presentation starting at age 14, we begin our transition programming for students in our district. And I'd really like to break it into three phases. So, phase one is that basic career awareness. We start with assessments and begin the conversations about what life might look like once school services are coming to an end. And we do begin building community instruction. So community-based instruction, probably like every other week where students begin going out into the community. Because we've learned that just because we teach it within a school setting doesn't mean it always generalizes into the communities that they'll be in once they leave school services. We feel like that's a really important piece to it. And then phase two, when we're getting into our high school years, it's more about career exploration. We're beginning a lot of those self-advocacy skills. We have our students create PowerPoints and begin their IEP meetings with PowerPoint. That really was a huge paradigm shift once we start doing that and it changes the entire trajectory of the meeting oftentimes when we start with the youth and them presenting their goals, and their dreams, and their strengths, and their needs. And community instruction usually moves to once a week where they're out in their communities. And then when they get to 11th and 12th grade, their instructors begin taking them travel training and using our public transportation system and trying to access. In addition to our district's community based instruction, we also have our instructors taking the students out to different locations within our community through public transportation. And we really began to try to have the students transition off of our yellow school buses to use public transportation to get to school, because being part of this partnership and program taught us that that is a huge win for the students when they can begin accessing their community and learn that travel training. It really helps with independence. Then we have our career development phase, which is 18 to 22. And the students are usually in their communities three or four days a week. A lot of times they're volunteering, getting internships, may even getting those after school or weekend jobs because we found that when they have a job in high school, it really has a lot --

Derek Shields: This is Derek, I'm going to jump in. It looks like we just had a disconnect with Jane and perhaps that was a tech issue. Could I just get confirmation that you all can hear me? Yeah, I got three head nods and a thumbs up from our panelists. While we try to get Jane back, she had us on the edge of our seat about the school district's role. Looks like she might be trying to reconnect, so just give her another 10 seconds here, and if not, then --

Jane Cordero: I'm here. Am I here?

Derek Shields: Jane, you're coming back. We can't see you, but we can hear you.

Jane Cordero: Okay.

Derek Shields: Yes. You disappeared for a second, about 10 or so, but you were finishing kind of phase three.

Jane Cordero: Yes.

Derek Shields: If you want to leave your camera off and just continue, that's great.

Jane Cordero: Okay. I was here the whole time. I'm not sure why my camera's not -- I see myself, but that's very strange. I don't know what happened there. So, phase three, I'm not

sure what the last thing you heard, but we began having the students learn their public transportation routes and trying to get them to come off the yellow bus services. And we also implement a vocational integration teacher at that level, 18 to 22, where they're assigned to each school, and they take smaller groups of students out based on their interests and skills into job and volunteer situations. So, all of that is how we try to get them out of our high school buildings so that they're in their communities and learning skills in natural real settings.

Derek Shields: Fantastic. So, a follow up there, when you consider kind of these phases and then connecting in, you mentioned to, I think you said something like community organizations and programs like the other panelists that we have today. How do you as a school district develop those partnerships with these agencies in support of your students?

Jane Cordero: Yes, that's a great question. So about 10 years ago the current school that I was working in was a middle school that was expanding to high school and we're very passionate about building out the best programming we could. We did a deep dive into outcomes and what happens when students exit services for our students with disabilities. And it was not a great picture. As much of the research shows that whole falling off the cliff then landing on parent sofas and not being connected to agencies. So, we really began to try to develop something different. And with that we started creating partnerships and relationships with different organizations. But the one was our local university, Derek -- Am I back? Am I here? I don't know.

Derek Shields: You're here. I hear you.

Jane Cordero: My internet looks stable. Everything seems fine on my end.

Derek Shields: You were mentioning your relationship with Drexel University.

Jane Cordero: Yes. And they have the A.J. Drexel Autism Institute that they were just beginning and creating. And part of that institute was a transition pathway. With that team of people -- they were finding a lot of the same problems with post school outcomes, and they wanted to do something with us. So, we partnered with them and in their research, they came across the Project SEARCH Program, which was the program Adrian was part of. And in order to be part of Project SEARCH, they wouldn't even allow us to call it that unless we could prove that we had all the partners at the table. So that included the Office Vocational Rehabilitation, and Intellectual Disabilities office. We had to show that we had an employment specialist, which is for our team Community Integrated Services and the family. We had to have the educational partner, which was the school district. And once we had all those people at the table, they finally came out and said, okay, yes, we can consider becoming this Project SEARCH Program, which was the first one in the city of Philadelphia. And one of the first or earliest ones that also had an autism overlay because we were working with Drexel University's Autism Institute. So it was pretty exciting times, but because of that partnership and all of the team coming together, I feel as though we built a very strong collaborative, cohesive team. And working together, we had a meeting once a month and we have continued that over these 10 years. That has allowed us to build the teams that you see here today and create what I believe is a true seamless transition for many of our youth in our city. So that's kind of how the story started.

Derek Shields: Well, thanks. I appreciate that framing, and it sounded like a pretty unique model, but now you have years behind you with that. And a lot of successes that I'm aware of through watching Drexel's autism program, but also knowing Project SEARCH in its growth. When you think of shared responsibility, in a little bit we're going to have Shari come on. When you consider the school district and the Vocational Rehabilitation agency as a partner, how do you look at shared responsibility between you and them?

Jane Cordero: It's instrumental in providing seamless transition services that we're hoping to achieve. Because we've developed that partnership on the district level, where we are able to, when problems arise, just pick up the phone and say, hey, we have this, we have that, we have this problem, we have that problem. And typically, we have all the releases already signed, so we're able to share information seamlessly because it's hard for parents often and the students themselves to navigate all the systems. And we really believe that by all of us working together, we've been able to break down those silos. We don't all work in our individual units anymore. We work as a cohesive team to help support all the families and young individuals. And that has been life changing for them all. On a school level, because of the work that I've done with this team, we're learning how to back map into our school systems of how to try to replicate a lot of that cohesiveness. So, we have many OVR counselors that work directly in our schools, which I'm sure Shari might talk a little bit more about. But it starts with Early Reach. We have our Early Reach Coordinators that we connect with and have them come into our school buildings and do presentations and a lot of those services that you spoke about at the earlier level. And then once they get closer to the exiting services we set up, we do intake meetings often within the school setting, so the parent only has to come to the school to do their intake meeting or things like that. We try to make it as simple as possible to coordinate services and work together to make it easier on families and students to get the things that they need.

Derek Shields: All right. That's fantastic. And I'm going to come back to one last question before we transition over to Shari and learn more about the VR role here. You mentioned how the Project SEARCH model came to be. Could you specifically recall how Adrian came on to your radar to participate in the Project SEARCH Program?

Jane Cordero: Sure. So originally when we first started all this, the current school that I had worked at, I thought we were just working within the bounds of our particular school. But for Project SEARCH at the time, we didn't have the correct age group to create that program. So, we had to open it up to the entire school district of Philadelphia. We began recruitment processes and put together some basic recruitment materials and got that out to all of our partners. So that included our schools, our counselors, our special education liaisons but also OVR counselors, our vocational intern. So when we do our outreach and our recruitment, we are making sure that we try to reach all of those things. And we had an application process. So Adrian, thank goodness, was advised to apply to the program. And our team does the entire skills assessment day. We invite the families in, the student in, and they have an interview, the family has an interview. It's a whole day of assessment and debriefing of the teams to find the best fit for everyone. And the team thought Adrian was a best fit for the model that we had in place at the time. But I'll have to tell you, it really took a lot to work with her family. There were a lot of scary asks and changes that were having to come into play. As I mentioned, she had received yellow school bus service her entire career. And now we were asking her to get on a

bus. And one of the funniest stories is about her dad following the bus throughout the city because he was terrified. And one day Adrian wound up coming home a few minutes later than normal. And it was because she had stopped at McDonald's to get herself, I think fries or something. And it was the first time she had ever done anything like that in her entire life. So it was really her gaining that independence and helping the family learn how to cut ties a little bit and trust in the systems, which worked out beautifully for Adrian. So that's how she came to be part of the program.

Derek Shields: That's outstanding. Thanks Jane, for sharing those stories. The idea of what might be minor things to some are significant milestones for others with the opportunity to have these independent living skills and experiences. And let's now transition over to Shari mentioning participation and Project SEARCH and the instrumental partnership that the Vocational Rehabilitation agency had. Thanks. So Shari, thanks for being with us again and everything that you're doing with your team. When Project SEARCH at Drexel was mentioned with the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services in your district, we hear it's the 10th anniversary. When you look at that program, how beneficial, in the impact for successful outcomes, is it for helping transition age youth pursue employment? I expect you have a career's worth of knowledge here, but this program itself, how does it compare to other things that you see for transition age, youth outcomes?

Shari Brightful: It's been extremely beneficial and very rewarding. Not only for just the office, but the community that we serve, that we all live and work in right now. To be able to be a resident of Philadelphia and be able to share with anyone I come into contact with that this is a program that we have here in Philadelphia, that the staff that I work with have been instrumental in being able to make those connections to build a rapport and to be able to provide the opportunities that the students are able to engage in is extremely rewarding. I do want to share that I started out as a transition counselor at OVR. I was an intern. So being able to show that when you work together and all parties have a vested interest in the individual success, that these are the types of things that could come from that. We are collaborating with one another. We all work for different agencies where we all have different outcomes as far as what are we expected to do in our individual roles, but we have come together for 10 years straight and figured out what we can do together. Obviously, we do better with each other and together we can do more. And the outcomes have been great. I know a lot of times we talk about at the end of the day, the goal is employment, but I've been able with my team to see a lot more. We are seeing individuals like Adrian, while she may not have been able to be on the call, she is dedicated to work. She is quiet but fierce as far as being able to share what makes her happy, what makes her shine. If you saw the picture, she has a beautiful smile. You cannot forget her smile. That she feels independent, she feels like she has been able to accomplish something. And like Jane shared about being able to get on the bus and go to McDonald's and grab fries, these are things that a lot of times we take for granted that some of our youth with disabilities don't necessarily have those opportunities. We are able to assume competence, and she is not shy in showing you that she has been able to maintain employment for eight years and she loves the work that she does.

Derek Shields: That's fantastic. I love it. And there's something about you saying it when you smile, you can feel it. Like Adrian's story impacts you and I think the entire employment team

that we have here. When you're proud of the work you do, it means that somebody out there has a gainful work experience in a future of something that they dreamed for, and that's now real. Part of the reason that happens is because of vocational rehabilitation services available to transition age youths. This is happening in Philadelphia; it's happening across Pennsylvania and across the country.

Can you describe some of the specific services that are available? So if somebody's with us today that's less familiar, but the services that are available to transition age youth through your VR programming?

Shari Brightful: Sure. Earlier Jane mentioned, and you all have great slides, that we have staff that are able to connect with the community, and specifically the school. The staff in Philadelphia are going into the high schools and they connect with the students. They connect with the families; they connect with the school staff. And then we also figure out how to connect with individuals in the community who can help support fostering independence, growth, learning some skills, and then applying those skills in real world situations so that later on they are in competitive integrated employment. And so our staff, our counselors, as well as what we call Early Reach Coordinators are going in and they are sitting in at the IEP meetings and being active participants in the IEP, being good listeners. A lot of times I find that you do better if you kind of listen first and then offer some information and suggestions to kind of see what is already being done and what we could do more to help fill in some of those gaps. A lot of the things that we talk about with families, the youth, and the school is what we call the pre-employment transition services, which I believe was on one of those slides where we offer the five required services mentioned. It was self-advocacy instruction, post-secondary exploration, job exploration, workplace readiness training and work-based learning. Our Early Reach Coordinators also go in and do groups with the students in the high school. I like to call them 21st century skills. They do a lot of hands-on work with the students so that they can move around, be able to voice what they've learned, whether it's verbally, or in pictures. I think it's big that they figure out how the student best communicates what they've learned and what they've been able to implement from some of those workshops. And then outside of the pre-employment transition services, we do expose the youth to things that are available for life after high school. You talked a little bit in the slide about the supported employment services, the customized employment and the Partnership Plus. We use a lot of words, a lot of acronyms. And so some of the things that we do with the students is also helping to untangle the services and how to connect to them. We use a lot of big words. We use a lot of acronyms and a lot of times we need to spend more time helping families navigate our systems where it's not confusing, where it's not difficult and we are supporting them, we are hearing them, we are building a rapport with them and doing what Jane talked about. Hearing what the fears are and not dismissing them, but figuring out what are your fears, what are the concerns, whether it's the student or the family, and then how can we address those concerns. For example, Adrian's father was the one who followed her behind the bus, but what he was able to see, because he needed to see that, is that my daughter can do it. I was fearing that it couldn't be done or someone was going to do something or she would get lost, but she was able to show him that she could do it. And these are the things and the services that we provide to help the transition be seamless for the student, but also for the family.

Derek Shields: Thank you, Shari. One last question here. When you think back to Adrian and the smile, could you connect back to a couple key services that your organization provided? And you just mentioned listening to fears, perhaps making complicated language less complicated so people understand systems and process and how to get what they need out of them. Anything in particular that you would point back to with that was an important intervention, without that, it wouldn't have happened?

Shari Brightful: Well, being a partner with a lot of the entities on this call, I think is really what was important for Adrian's success and her family's success. That we partner with CIS who provides -- they are one of the partners for Project SEARCH. We also connected Adrian with Angelina and team as far as making sure that people understand their benefits and what does it mean when you go to work? I think that no matter how many times we do presentations like this, you're always going to have individuals who explain to you that they can't work, that their benefits will be affected and that is not something that they want to move forward on. So being able to hear families and connect them to not only information and resources about why work is beneficial, but hearing what they're saying, trying out work and seeing how that will affect the individual and then supporting them along the way I think has been very beneficial. The other part I don't want to forget about Paul is that we live in an area where there is a mass transportation system, but there is still fear and there is still uncertainty around traveling and using SEPTA. A lot of our students are used to bussing back and forth pretty much the entire time they are in school. And I think that has been extremely instrumental. We're not just showing them how to travel but showing them how to travel safely. And, also showing them that if there's a change in their route, what do I need to do? Who do I need to contact, what do I need to look for when I'm traveling Philadelphia? So not only are they learning how to travel independently, but they're doing it in a safe manner.

Derek Shields: Well, that's fantastic, Shari. Thanks for all you're doing with Vocational Rehabilitation, but also for making it easy for me now to transition to Paul because you brought him up. So yeah, obviously the partnership and the collaboration connects the dots, but it's a information pathway along with the transition to work pathway. Paul, let's turn to you now and looking at Project SEARCH specifically, can you describe what the day-to-day routine looks like for a student that's participating in Project SEARCH?

Paul Barth: Yes, absolutely. We are very structured in Project SEARCH. It pretty much looks the same every day. All interns are asked to be in our training room by 7:49 in the morning. So, they're traveling on public transportation to get to the program. The first part of the day, which is about an hour or so, they're learning different skills like resume building, interview skills, even soft skills that they're not -- that we're not taught when going into a job. But the large majority of their day, they're off in their internship site from about roughly 9:15 to 2:15 every day. Over the course of a school year each intern gets three different internship rotations that are roughly like 10 weeks long. They get a lot of different experiences to see what their skills are, what they actually like and want to do for work or even what they don't want to do for work. So they're in their internship for most of the day. They come back for a half an hour to just like recap the day to go over what we learned earlier in the day, talk about anything that might have happened during the day and then they get dismissed at 2:49 every day. They go back off on public transportation and get back home safely.

Derek Shields: Excellent. Good structure and I appreciate the description. Well, I've been familiar with Project SEARCH and visited with Project SEARCH participants on site, and I never knew what it was like with the broader framework. I appreciate that a lot. So when you think of Adrian now and getting into her specific journey in the program, can you explain a little bit more about the journey that she experienced? Now I know that everybody's brought up the importance of transportation, so we might ask you to describe that from your perspective if something hasn't been shared, but what about the other areas and then speak to her transition into the adult service world of employment services. So, first Project SEARCH and then the broader employment services.

Paul Barth: Yes, everyone has mentioned travel training is a big thing with parents especially in our city of Philadelphia. So that was a big leap of faith for Adrian's parents to let her go off with me teaching her how to navigate the public transportation system in Philadelphia. She had to take a bus ride and then transfer to a train to get to the program, so it wasn't exactly the easiest way to get there. We have different ideas on how to teach. We use a lot of visuals to help them out. I'll go into Google Map Street View and go in a step-by-step direction so she can use it as a guide to get to where she's supposed to be going or if she forgets a certain portion of her route. The transportation was a big one, especially with her father, like we've mentioned. And especially like that first day, I'm always waiting there the first day just to make sure all our interns get there safely and it's always a relief once all eight show up. And Adrian did phenomenal with it. It really showed her parents that it's okay to let go a little bit. She was becoming a woman. She's going off into the workforce. Just showing her parents that she can do it was something really huge as the first step towards independence for her. Being in the program itself, it's great that we get to be with these young adults over the course of a school year, because you get to see how much they change from that first day in either late August or early September to that last day in June. You really get to see the change in their skills and they're basically a different person at the end of the program. And that, especially with Adrian, she really opened up during the program. Shari mentioned that she is quiet, but we really worked on her with her on her self-advocacy skills. And she really opened up to us and it was great, and Adrian made it easy on us when it comes to employment. She showed that she was ready to work. She gained skills throughout the course of the year. She really matured over this year and then when this opportunity at the airport opened, she was the first person that we were thinking of that we could put into that role. As you can see, she's not here today. That just speaks to her work ethic and her wanting to work and she's been working there for seven years straight now. And it's really a testament to Adrian and her hard work and it has really paid off.

Derek Shields: That's fantastic. You mentioned skills development during the internship timeframe. Obviously, young people during this time are maturing and growing in many ways, but sometimes we don't have access to the soft skills that could be used in work, in a job or full-time employment. Anything else that you would add to the soft skills development of note for Adrian that helped her be successful? You know, we do a task at work, but then there's a bit of the game of work and that's connecting with supervisors and colleagues. Anything that Project SEARCH as an internship brought up in soft skills that you can add?

Paul Barth: Yes, I mean, especially with Adrian as she works in an office, there is downtime. So we need to teach them what to do with our downtime or what to do when we run out of work.

You can't just sit there and not work for the rest of the day. Do you have to go to your manager and ask, hey, what's next? Or do you need help with anything else? And especially with Adrian, that was a little difficult at the start, but really working with her on her advocacy skills she really shined through it by the end of the program.

Derek Shields: Thanks a lot Paul, appreciate that and all you're doing with the Project SEARCH model. So we'll be back to you and Shari and Jane in a moment for our Q&A but now I'm going to ask Angelina to come on. Of course, when we do EN Essentials, this is about the work of Employment Networks and this collaboration leads to talking to Angelina now about the Ticket to Work process for Adrian and describing kind of where that came in as part of this connecting the dots process and maybe a little bit from like the VR perspective and the provider perspective and if you can describe how - maybe Partnership Plus a little bit - but take your time. We're doing well on time, so go ahead Angelina.

Angelina Bush: Sure. Thanks Derek. I first met Adrian when she was a student in our Project SEARCH program and the very first step we take is benefits counseling. We meet with Adrian, dad, and mom to discuss what are the questions, what are the concerns, let's talk about that. At this point, we're not even necessarily talking about Ticket to Work, we're more focused on providing the benefits counseling service. So, Adrian and her family have a great understanding of what happens to benefits when work starts and at some level that we're unsure of because while we're in the program we're prepping for work, but we're not actually looking for work at that very moment. So it is a little bit early in the process, which is really essential especially for young people who are thinking about work for the first time. There's a lot of questions, concerns, and fears that come along. We'll say Adrian's dad specifically was very, very worried about her losing her Medicaid eligibility and being able to maintain her medical insurance. So we just followed up with them, for the duration of the Project SEARCH program. And then when Adrian was offered this position at the Philadelphia airport, that's when we really sprang into action with her to provide real-time information or reporting to Social Security, the actual impact to her benefits, how does she maintain her medical insurance while working at such a substantial level. At that point, Adrian's Ticket to Work was in use with VR as the typical process that occurs for someone who's using VR services. So, we started to also then have that conversation with Adrian about continuing to use her Ticket to Work after VR is finished. So we just followed along with Adrian providing the benefits counseling support from our end and as for Ticket to Work, we would know that VR services are going to be done. We communicated with VR to plan for, what is that date that they are going to successfully close out Adrian's case. We prepped Adrian and her dad on what that looks like, what that means, paperwork that comes from the Ticket to Work Program with regards to that Ticket being in use with VR. And then at that point we created the IWP with Adrian, reviewed what that meant for her as far as continuing on with the program. She gladly signed, by that point she was already transitioning to being off cash benefits from Social Security and just excited to be working and maintaining her work at that point. So, then we pulled her into the program, officially assigned her Ticket and continued to work with her and support her over the course of time with her benefits, while Paul's kind of side is continuing with Project SEARCH and then the employment services piece as well. Adrian's case is kind of the perfect match of Partnership Plus where we have all the different players coming to the room. Shari and her team with VR, providing the services

under that umbrella and then moving over to the EN side once the OVR closure was successfully made.

Derek Shields: When that transition happened, in thinking back to one person and then there's three plans in these lives, right? The student has the IEP, and then the VR consumer has the IPE, and then you come in the Ticket program and there's the IWP. Any reflections on that, like how that can be a strength versus in talking to the Ticketholder or to the family of how you connect those? Or does that become a complicated transition as oh, here's another plan and is that a burden?

Angelina Bush: I think it can be a very complicated concept for both the people we support and their families. And I think we've mentioned this time and time again today is there are different systems and different criteria, and they can work together very nicely, but they don't always work together very nicely. For Adrian, in her case, she really had a seamless transition from service to service, leaving the school, being involved with VR, starting this position, and also having Project SEARCH. And we were just in the room from the beginning with her, thankfully. When it was time to talk about the IWP, it was, this is another document that we need to look at, review, if you want to continue on with receiving employment services and benefits counseling, we can do this for you. And essentially for her, nothing was changing. She was going to work and continuing to get the supports that she needed at work. We were still in communication with dad and her when there were questions and things. We needed to work through some things. From our perspective, it worked very nicely and we were able to really have this seamless transition for her where yes, there's paperwork and switching programs, but she didn't experience a change or an interruption of services at any rate.

Derek Shields: Excellent. That's great to hear. And I know that the frustrations can exist, but if we look at the connections of similar goal setting and those steps to achieve timely progress towards those goals, there's a lot of similarities in the plans and hopefully that becomes a habit for Adrian and others. That goal setting is something that will become a habit. Angelina, a follow up there, one of the things that we said early on was we need to refer transition age youth for benefits counseling. Can you go into a little bit deeper explanation of some of the benefits counseling that you find is key? Yes, fears with parents, but also understanding the complexities of some of the work incentives that might be used at different times?

Angelina Bush: Sure, yes. So benefits counseling is a beast. It takes a lot of hard work and dedication to have someone become certified and maintain that certification. But it is really an essential part of going to work, returning to work. We kind of internally say benefits counseling is the gateway to employment because people aren't going to pick employment if they don't know what's happening to their cash benefit or don't know what's happening to their medical insurance. So we really do love that we're able to provide the service not only to Adrian, but to other people that we support as well, through our VR vendor relationship and through other relationships that we have. But we also all know that there's the WIPA service that's available as well for individuals, starting at age 18 to provide free benefits counseling services to those who are interested in looking for work which is essential and getting in the weeds with people and looking at some of the work incentives that are available. And for Adrian, for her it was

really maintaining the Medicaid eligibility through 1619(b) and understanding what that meant for her and how she can continue to receive her insurance along the way.

Derek Shields: Thanks for that specific example. I'm sure that allayed some of the fears that the family had and that Adrian would have in order to access the Medicaid benefits, which allowed, it sounds like the transition to full-time employment to occur. And now we're seven years later where this is the tradeoff that's happened of full-time employment and financial independence as a future, which is fantastic. Thanks Angelina. Before we enter Q&A, I'm going to ask if you do have questions, you can start preparing those. If you want to provide them in chat, you can go ahead and do so. Jane and Shari have been listening for a little while. Before we go over to the Q&A I wanted to circle back to you two. I know as a panelist I often have thoughts, oh, I wish I would've said this or let me add this to something. Jane, anything that you wanted to contribute to some of the comments before we go to the Q&A. And, we can see you again.

Jane Cordero: This is great news. I have no idea what happened there. I was -- it was all fine on my end, but I'm glad we're all back. I did have something that I wanted to make sure that we talked about today that related to I guess just the preparedness in all of the things that happens in Project SEARCH. That, again, as a district, I know we're trying to back map and put in place in many of our classrooms in our district buildings. But just all of those soft skills that we don't really learn and talk about. I think that the biggest, the most powerful part of all this is getting the students outside of the four walls of a school building. And I just can't speak enough about the power that has and just learning the different environment between how you act and relate and communicate in the school building compared to an office environment or business environment, it's completely different. And Paul works so well with many of the modifications and accommodations that can help students through a lot of that just, I think of like all the travel training. I remember we had a horrific issue where a student never came home at the end of the night and it was terrifying and the team all worked together, but the next day Paul had a thing that he kept in his pocket, a communication system that he worked through and they did on demand role play situations if he got lost, like out on the SEPTA, out on public transportation. So just all of those little things that you don't think about when you're just in a school building and as educators that we might not always consider students having the need to have instruction and some of those things like even just resume writing, mock interviews, how to show up at the interview, professionalism, how you have to dress differently. So these are all skills that I think are so important that we have begun incorporating into our classrooms that are instrumental in making sure that they're ready, that they show up ready for employment.

Derek Shields: Thanks, Jane. And one follow up, when we think of this, well, seven years post full-time employment for Adrian, how does the school district look at employment as an outcome for a student in Adrian's situation? Is there a way to consider her success as your outcome, or is there a disconnect between that employment outcome and what you're trying to do?

Jane Cordero: No, it absolutely correlates. I mean, we're looking for competitive integrated employment, so but I think that's the beauty. It's hard as a district, I guess, to capture some of that data. But I think, again, because of this team, we work with all the different systems to

help get those numbers in place. We just had a partner's meeting yesterday, and we went over a lot of data about outcomes, and Paul attends the national conference every year, and they require a certain amount of data to say whether we're being effective or not as a Project SEARCH site. So all of that information is helpful to our district to know how successful we are. But then also in Pennsylvania, we have certain indicators for our state, like indicator 13 and 14, which directly correlate to employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. And we do surveys. And then indicator 14 is our post school data where we follow up with families a year out to see how things are going also. So there are some of the things that as a district we do in terms of collecting data and trying to make sure that we're on the right path.

Derek Shields: Excellent. Thanks for sharing those specifics. We have these in each state, and it's all of our collective efforts to try to increase employment outcomes for youths and young adults to experience as we focus on today, access to good jobs and good careers for all. So Shari, over to you too, I know you've been listening for a little while now. Anything that you wanted to tag in from either the VR perspective or just your personal perspective to the conversation?

Shari Brightful: The individuals on the panel with me, they've been instrumental because we all come to the table, and all collaborate together. We wholeheartedly believe that in order for all of us to succeed, each entity has to succeed. So, we all work together to make sure with this collaboration that we show up every day and that we support one another every single day throughout the collaboration. And I think that's what means a lot to me as a manager. In Philadelphia, we have a lot of students who deserve our support, who want our support. And if we come together and make sure that as leaders, or managers, or directors in our own agencies support the work that we need to do and support our staff, that this is the result of what can happen. We have a strong relationship together, but I think all of us, if we were able to bring on our direct reports as far as our executive teams, or our supervisors, managers, directors on the call as well, you'll see that they believe in the work that we're doing, that they support what we're trying to do. And when we show these stories, when we tell these stories, when we highlight the work that we're doing they will advocate for us to make sure that these types of opportunities continue to stay in existence. So, I appreciate the team, but I also appreciate the leadership that has supported us to be able to bring this team together.

Derek Shields: Thanks for that, Shari. It seems of course, collaboration can be the key to many successes, but it seems that it's your greatest strength between your organizations and it is a pipeline, in itself, to employment outcomes, which is fantastic. So, while we've had a great discussion and appreciate each of your answers and talking with me, what we want to do is now open the session up for a Q&A with our attendees. To do that, if I could have the slides returned, I just wanted to provide a comment or two to our attendees about how to ask their questions. We'll give it a second to have the slide return. Thanks Rose. And if we can move forward to the next slide.

So of course, we encourage your questions and there are a couple different ways to ask the panelists. You can use the MS Teams chat, which we have had a couple exchanges in or you could contact us via telephone to voice your question. Via phone, it's a two-step process. Press star five to raise your hand, and then we will unmute your phone and then you'll need to press

star six on your end to speak. So, two steps, star five, we'll unmute you as we call upon you. And then star six to speak. If you're with Teams and you prefer to ask your question aloud, instead of using chat, just use the raise your hand feature, which would be at the top menu, and then we will call on you and you can unmute your mic. We do ask to limit your question to one per participant. If we don't have a lot of extra questions, then we can circle back for a second one. If you prefer to send in your question or additional questions to be answered later, you can send those questions or comments to us via email as well at enoperations@yourtickettowork.ssa.gov. With that we also have those instructions in chat.

There was something that came in the chat earlier. I just want to acknowledge for those that might be on the telephone. There's a question. Is WIPA available at age 14 or 18? I heard both that benefits counseling and WIPA can prioritize you starting at age 14, and Angelina mentioned 18. Tammy posted a comment that's coming from the SSA site that it is available beginning at age 14. You might have some differences between who's the providing the benefits counseling, but WIPA services are available and prioritized for youth, beginning at age 14, looking at transition moving forward. So we just wanted to call that out. And then of course, you can always reach out to the beneficiary helpline to get some more information on that or go to the website. Let me go down to the new messages and see if we can check in with Katherine and Brittney on our team if we have any other questions. I do encourage you to ask your questions. We have a panel of experts here that are working in the Philadelphia region to drive employment through unique programming. Today we're focused on Project SEARCH as that key vehicle for Adrian's employment outcome.

Katherine: Hi there, this is Katherine. I do not see any raised hands at this time.

Derek Shields: Thanks. I think we have an audience that's in an intake mode. Perhaps they're not sure of the questions or you all have been so specific in how you operate, they're ready to jump in themselves, but we do encourage you to ask your questions to allow these four experts to be able to share their information. In the meantime, I have a couple extra thoughts that I'm going to bring up because I have the four of you, so I'll just see if we can ask some questions here. I would love to know a lesson that each of you learned from each other, either from a program perspective or kind of a service impact perspective. Building off of Shari's comments that your collaboration model works, but what's something that you learned from the other organization or partner that would be helpful for other Employment Networks to know in that regard? Angelina, let's start with you as an Employment Network, is there something that you learned from these other partners that you'd be like, hey, this was really key and as an EN I should have known that before. I'm glad I know it now.

Angelina Bush: I would say coming from my perspective of the EN and benefits counseling, I'm definitely less familiar with how students are receiving services at the school level. I would say for myself it would be, don't make assumptions, and ask questions when unsure. And then another good tip is to connect with the VR counselors. For Adrian, we're in frequent contact with her OVR counselor and the preparation for when VR is going to complete the service with Adrian so that we could then have that smooth transition for her. So that was another good thing we learned with Adrian in this process.

Derek Shields: Thanks for that. In connecting with the school district, because there is this Project SEARCH model in place, it seems to have made all of this easier for you because you all got involved with each other through this program. Is that accurate?

Angelina Bush: I would say, from my perspective, yes. It definitely has helped create the partnerships.

Derek Shields: Okay. And if that isn't there, which is a possibility, you could look at implementing a Project SEARCH model like yours and starting that. But if it isn't there and the Project SEARCH model isn't going to be implemented, let's go over to Jane. Jane, who should somebody reach out to at the school district to do what Angelina just said? Angelina was like, don't assume things, reach out to the school district and begin a relationship. What office is generally the place to go and who should they talk to?

Jane Cordero: Right. At the school level, it would typically be their special education liaison or something like that. They are the boots on the ground, first line of contact, I would think. Or in Adrian's case, she used her guidance counselor in her school. But then, at least in Philadelphia, every school has a special education director and case manager. So they're the next line. And then after that we have an office of special education and diverse learners at our central district administration building. So I'm sure many districts are set up somewhat similarly in terms of the chain of command and the lines of command. So at the school level it would be the special ed people or department. And then there's usually some people that are the in-betweens from the district, and then the actual office of special education for the district.

Derek Shields: Thanks, that's helpful. So a couple different options. If you want to look at a region and get that relationship going, go at the district level. If you want to look at a specific school, go to the special education team and explore there. That's helpful. So I'm going to come back on my question because I'm still interested in it, but in the meantime, Janine has submitted a question for us about Partnership Plus. Janine, I believe is with an Employment Network out in Utah and is asking the question - what's the best way to work in Partnership Plus as an EN? So I think I'd like to ask Angelina to start that response and then maybe go over to Shari. Seven years ago we had a Partnership Plus case in Pennsylvania that led to this successful outcome. You were mentioning that. How would somebody begin though to have a Partnership Plus relationship? Angelina, do you want to provide a comment there?

Angelina Bush: Sure, yes. So I guess I have two suggestions. One would be to reach out to your EN support contact. So for me it's Brittany Boyd, and she's been fabulous with helping us in Pennsylvania and we actually just recreated a new Partnership Plus agreement and model that we were able to sign up to. So I would say that would be first step is reach out to your contact that you have from TPM. And then the other thing is, if your VR agency is not in the process of creating or doesn't want to for some reason, formally create a Partnership Plus agreement, there's no reason that you still cannot work with your local VR agencies. So it would be looking online and finding out who those contacts are, reaching out, making an introduction and explaining what services you can provide and making a contact that way.

Derek Shields: Thank you, Angelina. Yes, so seven years ago there was an active Partnership Plus model in Pennsylvania. It kind of -- the energy was lost and now there's a reinvigoration

from a statewide leadership perspective with vocational rehabilitation that allows you to reengage, but it's not necessary. There could be an informal handoff once case closure occurs, and then ongoing EN services occur as well. So I appreciate both descriptions. Shari, from your perspective with your regional administrator role with the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, how do you look at Partnership Plus and the idea of consecutive services after case closure? Is that something that -- what would you tell an Employment Network that's out there in the country from your experience?

Shari Brightful: I think with our, with the population that we are serving, that the more we can provide, I think the better. You have a lot of individuals on this call who want to be able to provide information and resources to individuals who are seeking employment. A lot of times we have agency guidance rules, policies, and regulations about not duplicating services and not having certain things happen simultaneously. And our partnership right now shows that you can still work within the parameters of your agency's policies and guidelines, but still offer a pool of resources to individuals so that they could result in employment that works and meets the needs of the individual. I've been with the agency since 2004 and you kind of talked about the statewide initiative to have Partnership Plus provider agreements. It's a tongue twister right there. That sometimes you put things in place and they kind of fizzle out and then you have individuals who kind of bring it back to light and this partnership is showing that it works. Adrian's story is one of many stories that we hope highlight that these types of partnerships result in what you see with Adrian today.

Derek Shields: That's fantastic. Thank you, Shari - appreciate that. Yes. You know, the idea of Partnership Plus, as one of my colleagues frames it, is collaboration plus. It could be a Partnership Plus model, more importantly, it's about the collaboration from partners like yourselves that are focused on the commonality of services that are needed along this pipeline to employment. I love that. So we're getting short on time. Circle over to Paul, in about 30 seconds Paul, something that you would answer back to that question. What's something that you've learned from one of these partnership colleagues that you would share with other attendees today that was important to you?

Paul Barth: I mean, I'm picking up multiple things from everyone throughout the years. The great thing is that Shari is office or OVR Jane in the school district, myself with supported employment, Angelina with benefits counseling. You can pick from everyone and that's why this is such a great team. We all have our bottom line, but when it comes down to it, it's all about the individuals that we serve. So it's been wonderful working with everyone over the years.

Derek Shields: Thank you, Paul. And thank you for all the work that you're doing. And over to Jane again, about 30 seconds, a final thought about the collaboration and something that folks could have as a takeaway.

Jane Cordero: Absolutely. I always say we couldn't do it alone. One good example that I wanted to add to the story was the thing about students registering and getting with all these adult agencies, and our school district. I have no idea if their reevaluation report when they leave us isn't right, doesn't have a psychologist signature or doesn't have the right assessments, like a IQ score or adaptive testing, they're denied and then they never can get their adult service.

Something that simple that we can easily fix as a district before students leave us has been life-changing. But I don't think we ever would've known it unless we start working together as part of this team. So it's all the small things that we learn that we just -- I don't think any one of our agencies couldn't do any of it ourselves. We all need each other to make it work.

Derek Shields: Fantastic. Thank you, Jane for that. The system is complex, so with each other we can understand the greater process and without that, we're not going to be able to better help our transition age youth get to where they need to be. So we appreciate that. And with that, I need to proceed to the slide, please.

I'd like to thank our panelists for being with us, Paul and Angelina from Community Integrated Services Employment Network, Shari Brightful the Philadelphia Area Administrator of Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and Jane Cordero with the Philadelphia School District. All of them are available to have any follow up discussions. And we've shared their email addresses here. All of them are key in the responsibility of successfully helping Adrian transition to successful employment.

And while Adrian's not here today we do know from her success story that work matters to Adrian. And I just wanted to pull out a quote to end on this because it is all about her. "I love everything about my job," Adrian says. "I like helping to organize things. I like my coworkers and they like me. I like getting out of the house and getting fresh air. Helping people makes me feel good." And that makes us all feel good too.

So thanks to our panelists for your time today. I know you have important work to do and we appreciate you being with us. Next slide, please.

In wrapping up, we have some resources to provide. We mentioned the youth website for informing ages 14 to 17, along with their guardians and teachers. That's ssa.gov/youth. We also have a document - What you need to know about your Supplemental Security Income when you turn 18, and Information and Supports to help SSI Youth become Self-Sufficient. A link there. And the final one - What you need to know about Earning Money and SSI. It is three fact sheets and one website in your youth and young adult toolkit there. And with that, let us turn to our upcoming events on the next slide.

Please mark your calendars for October 23rd for our next WISE webinar. This one's entitled Ticket to Work, Supporting Access to Good Jobs for All, again, October 23rd at 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time. Then on November 5th, we have our next All Call, the All EN Payments call. Please mark that and attend. And last on November 13th, we will have our final EN Essential Session for the year. So please schedule that one month from now for the same time, 1:00 p.m. Eastern. And with that we have a note at the bottom. You can access all of our calendar of events along with these EN Essential Sessions on the Your Ticket to Work website under the calendar of events. And if you have any questions or comments regarding this or ideas for future EN Essentials, we encourage you to email us at enoperations@yourtickettowork.ssa.gov. We appreciate your feedback and ideas and look forward to future EN Essentials events. This ends today's webinar. Thank you.