**Creating Career Pathways for Youth with Mental Health Conditions**

Marsha Langer Ellison, PhD

Sandra Miller

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JOANN STARKS: Good afternoon, and thank you for joining us today. I'm Joann Starks from American Institutes for Research, or A-I-R. Formally, our organization based in Austin, Texas was known as S-E-D-L or SEDL. Earlier this year, SEDL merged with AIR, and we're happy to represent the Austin office I will be moderating today's webcast, entitled Creating Career Pathways for Youth with Mental Health Conditions. This webcast is offered through the Center on Knowledge Translation for Disability and Rehabilitation Research, or KTDRR, which is funded by the National Institute on Disability independent Living and Rehabilitation Research, NIDILRR. I also want to thank my colleague Ann Outlaw, for her support for today's webcast. One activity of the center on KTDRR is a series of webcasts, and a community of practice to help promote the understanding, and use of evidence based practices in the field of vocational rehabilitation, or VR.

Cindi Cai is the project director. And, our colleague Emma Hinkens has also been instrumental in the development of this webcast. A reminder for all participants, there are some materials accompanying today's event that can be found on the web page advertising this webcast. The presentation is available as a PDF file of the slides, as well as a text version. The slides on the computer screen are small, so having the actual file or print out could be helpful. If you have not downloaded the materials yet you can go back to your confirmation email, and click on the title of today's webcast. Scroll down that page to download materials. Please remember, these materials are copyrighted, and you must contact our presenters to ask permission to use this information.

If you have any questions during or after the webcast, please feel free to send them to us at ktdrr@air.org. We'd also appreciate your feedback today by filling out a very brief evaluation form after the webcast. I'll remind you about this at the end of today's presentation.

Here's the agenda for today. After an overview of the webcast topic, I will introduce our presenters, and we will have a facilitated discussion. We'll then wrap things up by letting you know how to become part of this discussion. In today's webcast, we have a dialogue between a researcher and a transition coordinator to discuss the use of career pathway strategies to support the employment of youth with mental health conditions.

In our dialogue today, we will discuss four central questions. What are the barriers to employment for youth with mental health condition? What are the career pathways strategies to support the employment of youth with mental health conditions? How are these strategies being used in VR practices? What is the role of practice guidelines in supporting counselors to apply career pathway strategies?

We are happy to have two panelists with us today. Marsha Langer Ellison, PhD. is an associate professor at the department of psychiatry, and is the deputy director of the NIDILRR funded Transitions Research and Training Center at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. We also have Sandra J. Miller, who's the transition coordinator at the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

First, we'll turn to Marsha who will discuss barriers to employment for youth with mental health conditions, and how career pathway strategies can help from a researcher's perspective. Marsha?

MARSHA LANGER ELLISON: Hi, Joann. Thanks. The first thing we thought we'd present everybody is a description of the population of youth and young adults with serious mental health conditions. So, there are a variety of ways to describe these young people. And one, of course, is having a diagnosis of a serious emotional disturbance. And, that is the qualification that's used by special education services. Alternatively, clinicians, mental health clinicians, may diagnose a serious mental illness. And, those disorders can include things such as depression, anxiety, psychosis, or eating disorders that start before the age of 24, and are likely to persist into adulthood.

To get a sense of the size of that population there are 6.5 million youth and young adults with serious mental health conditions in the USA. And, importantly, it is to know that among young adults who have, youth and adults who have a disability and a burden of disability, 45 percent of those are young adults who have a serious mental health condition. So, it lets you know about the pervasiveness of serious mental health conditions among young people.

Given that population, what do we know about what are their career outcomes?

I have a few statistics here that, unfortunately, paint a fairly dismal picture. More than 50 percent of students 14 years and older with a serious mental health condition drop out of high school. This is the highest dropout rate for students of any disability group, If they manage to go on to college, they tend to experience longer delays when entering college. And, while in college, continue to show high dropout rates and low graduation rates.

Those students with a mental health condition who have a post high school employment rate of only 50 percent if they are not in college they are likely not working. And so, given this picture we want to ask what is the relationship of education to careers? So, we already know that they are dropping out of high school and that they're dropping out of college. And, is that important? And, we do know that there is a very strong correlation between education and employment for adults with serious mental health conditions as well is for the general population.

And, this bar chart created by Michelle Mullin at the Department of Rehabilitation and Counseling Professions at Rutgers’s, display's this very clearly. So, you can see that on the right, on the green bar, is our weekly earnings in 2014. It's obvious that there's a direct relationship between educational attainment and weekly earnings.

More importantly, there is a median of income at the dotted line, and you can see that dotted line crosses right between an Associate's Degree and a Bachelor's Degree. So, what that means is that for the general population to go over the boundary of the median income for US workers, you need to proceed past an Associate's Degree to a Bachelor's Degree.

On the other side of the chart, on the red bar, is a portrayal of unemployment rates. And, very similarly, there are much higher unemployment rates as you go down in education. And again, with the median of unemployment at 5%, is really demarkets those with Associate's Degrees, and those who have some college but no degree.

So, this tells us that education is very important to later income, and careers, and earnings. And, this is equally true for people with serious mental illness as well as for the general population. So, what are the barriers for young people to obtain these degrees, and obtain this better employment rates? In terms of the individual there are, of course, impairments that are due to mental health conditions and substance use.

And, there's a variety of cognitive difficulties that often accompany mental health conditions as well as the actual impact of the impairment itself. Young people will be having difficulty staying in school. Might have delays due to hospitalization, and those kinds of issues. However, there are other difficulties too. And, there's age typical difficulties. And, this is true for all young people that they are going through a turbulent stage of life. And, young people are really trying to establish their independence. They are forming intimate relationships, and they are establishing their own set of values. And, there is a lot of change that goes on between living at home and not living at home, and so forth. So, we characterize this as a turbulent stage of life. It is particularly difficult for young people with a mental health condition who are coming from backgrounds of trauma and child welfare. Many of whom don't have a role model of someone who has completed education, and is successfully working, and really can't even or don't envision themselves as being able to succeed in college or even in substantial employment without disability benefits.

Those are some of the individual barriers, but then there are structural and systemic barriers. A very important one is the bifurcation of child and adult services. And, as I'm sure many of you know, that the eligibility criteria changes from, in most states, for child mental health and adult services, and there's not a natural transition from one service sector to the other. There are a lot of young people who literally fall off at the end of child mental health services, and then may reappear back in crisis back in their 30's.

Also, the adult services that we do have tend to be tailored to an older population, and are not seen as relevant or helpful to young people. And, there really needs to be an effort to try to adapt and tailor existing adult evidence based practices so that they are relevant, and accessible, and perceived as helpful to young people.

So, the stigma and discrimination persists for young people as well as adults. Young people are even more reluctant to disclose having mental health conditions than maybe their older counterparts. We consider disability benefits to be a support, but more correctly, to be a barrier to careers as young people will start to envision themselves not as workers. And, there is data that shows that young people are least likely to get off of it. The younger that you are to get onto benefits, the less likely you are to get off of benefits later in life.

Service providers know that financial, and especially transportation issues, can really impede a young person's ability to work, as it does with all people with disabilities.

So, what are some of the strategies that can help to avert some of these negative trajectories of career development?

So, Supported Employment has been a service that is developed for adults with serious mental health conditions. And, it enjoys being an evidence based practice with having the highest rates of employment for that service compared to other kinds of service delivery strategies. That said, even Supported Employment succeeds with a 42 to 60 percent employment rate for people who enter their service. But, that's still way better than a lot of other attempts.

Supported Education has been around quite a while. But, it's still being experimented with, and manualized, and tested. So, we don't have yet a single model of supported education or a rigorous evidence base, but, nonetheless, Supported Education is a rehabilitation service like Supported Employment that has been described to be individualized, and community based, and meant to help individuals to identify an education goal to acquire the supports and strategies that they need to succeed in an educational setting. So, those two strategies, Supported Employment, Supported Education, has been used, lately, in first episode trials.

These are randomized trials, the most prominent of which is the National Institute of Mental Health RAISE Initiative. And, there are about 30 sites who are delivering services to young people with first episode of psychosis, and they are combining Supported Educational and Supported Employment in order to improve the outcomes for that group.

We also know that internships and work experiences are the best predictors for young people with disabilities to have successful post school outcomes, and that's also true for young people with serious mental health conditions. So, we here at the transitions RTC consider all of these things to be instrumental to developing better career pathways for this population. I also have here on this slide some finding's from the NLTS2 a study that we conducted with Mary Wagner here are our center. And, she examined four high school students who are in special education with serious emotional disturbance. What are their predictors for positive career outcomes? And, her five findings were that a concentration of vocational credits in high school, so that means at least four credits in high school on a vocational track was directly correlated with better employment after school. After high school.

Also, student led transition IEP meetings was, similarly, a predictor for better post school outcomes. And, the participation of adults serving agencies, meaning vocational rehabilitation, and especially community colleges on transition teams, was also a strong predictor for better post school outcomes. These were what we called malleable factors. Factors that state systems and educational systems can adopt and use. And, these were the only really strong predictors for better post school outcomes among high school students with serious emotional disturbance.

So, on this slide, I am reporting on some results of research that I conducted together with Michelle Mullen at Rutgers’s University on innovative practices for supporting young adults with serious mental health conditions for their career development. And, we interviewed 30 programs across the country who are nominated as having an innovative practices. And, these were some of the things that these programs told us about what they did to help young people get careers, and jobs, and stay in school.

So, the first of these is age specific programming. And, that's also related to the last bullet on this slide of youth oriented engagement practices. So, as I said, more typical adult practices are not tailored to young people. But, young people will want to see programs that are specific to them. So, they are interested, if they see a room full of 40 year olds and up, that is a population that they don't relate to. So, if you have programming that is specific to young people, or to teenagers, they're more likely to access those programs. In terms of engaging young people, you often hear adult agencies say, oh, you just can't get them in here. They don't show up. That's true. But, what you need to do is to adopt assertive outreach to young people.

And, part of that means using the methods of communication that they use. Texting and social media. So, if your agency doesn't permit texting, and you really want to serve young people you need to turn that policy around.

Tolerance for missed appointments and gaps in services. Young people are notoriously unreliable. If you're going to dismiss a young person from your service because they missed three appointments in a row, then you will never see them again. But, conversely, if you provide a welcoming situation and communicate that they can always come back, and they're not going to be penalized for missing appointments, then you're more likely to see them and engage them in services.

We heard about protecting the non-patient role. Young people, of course, like any individual with serious mental health condition, does not want to be identified as a patient, as a psychotic, or any other sort of disparaging name like that. And, rather if your program, as VR programs do, are trying to see you as a person who can work, and should work, and be part of social fabric of employment, young people will respond to that, and they will be engaged, and come to services.

Adapting practices to fit developmental changes. Young people may enter service living at home, and not have very many independent living skills. You may need to help them with independent living skills and then they will move on through this turbulent change of life. An agency is best suited to be able to respond as young people grow and change.

So, related to that is continuous support. So, we find that the programs that we interviewed provided redevelopment services for at least a year, and many for several years, because of the developmental turbulent change of life, then you need ongoing services as a young person grows.

There also is a focus on both work and school, whether you do that with separate clinicians or counselors who are doing Supported Employment versus Supported Education, or you combine them in the same individual. I mean, there's a lot of debate about whether to combine or separate. But, what is important is that your agency is able to respond to both school goals and work goals, as these will fluctuate for individuals. They may choose to work for a year and then go to school, or go to school part time while they're also working. So, so there is flexibility needed on the part of the agencies to respond to both of those goals.

Finally, we identified through this survey a number of skills that are needed by young people, and that agencies need to be able to help young people acquire the skill. In terms of personal skills, young people need to know how to cope. How to cope with stress, how to cope with their mental health condition, and develop these kinds of coping skills to respond. Financial literacy is very important for young people as they're first learning how to balance a budget, live on their own, use a checkbook. Executive functioning, broadly. This is developing in young people, and may not complete developing until well into their upper '20s. And so, efforts to help them with time, and task management, and calendaring, organizational skills.

All of those things are needed by young people to help them succeed in their careers. Also self-advocacy. As young people are working with employers and professors they do need to learn how to speak for themselves. How to describe their condition, how to acquire accommodations.

In terms of work skills, these programs who are doing career development are provide very concrete efforts around teaching young people how to interview, what to expect, what is work behavior, how do you interact with coworkers, how do you ask for leave time, and also how do you disclose your mental health condition on the workplace, to whom should you disclose, and what should you say? For those young people who are in educational settings they need to know how to access the resources at their campus. Some programs describe using a campus resource map, and actually sitting down with the individual, and listing out where is tutoring, where is mental health counseling, what are their hours, what are their numbers. Being very concrete about laying out what are the resources available to them at school.

Young people need to know how to apply for school, and often will need somebody to hold their hands and walk them through a school application. Also, to go to the schools and check them out, and see if, to what extent, it might be mental health friendly or not. Financial aid is a very complicated process. And young people will need somebody to walk them through applications for financial aid.

Transition to college stress. Once they're in school, it's best that service providers don't abandon them. Because, once they're in school then they have to start learning how to manage their calendar, learn how to handle the stress of assignments, and exams, and completing these things. As well as learning how to ask for extensions of time, or other kinds of acquiring accommodations, other efforts to do that. Young people with mental health conditions don't typically identify themselves as having a disability. They're unaware that they can use disability student services, and they need to be able to address any stigma that's in their way about being able to go to disability services and request accommodations, and bring those to their professor.

So, I'm going to conclude here with some key issues for vocational rehabilitation. So, as all of you know, there are new WIOA mandates for pre-employment transition services. And, these are some that are on this slide, and what's important is that these transition services are as meaningful and applicable to young people with mental health conditions as they are to any other disability group.

So, we encourage vocational rehabilitation counselors to think about these in terms of their caseload of young people with mental health conditions.

I know that Sandy, in the next part of this webinar, are going to be talking about how VR can do transition planning with high schools, and our research has shown that that's a very important piece of the puzzle. Also, we want to encourage vocational rehabilitation to support higher education of young people with mental health conditions, who often have the capacity to succeed well in school, and we've already demonstrated how important education is to long term vocational success.

So VR agencies have the authority to pay for tuition and this is a service that young people with mental health conditions really ought to be able to take advantage of. I have some references here for some of the statistics that I presented in the beginning part of the slide, please take a look. There's very good studies out there.

So, this is my final slide, and it demonstrates our acknowledgment for the National Institute on Disability and Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research, who funded the research that we presented in this slide to encourage listeners to visit us at the umassmed.edu website on our slide there at the transitions RTC, where we have many tip sheets and briefs that will be helpful in developing careers support for this population.

JOANN STARKS: Thank you very much, Marsha. We will now hear from Sandra Miller, who will discuss how the VR agency in Delaware has applied career pathway strategies to support the employment of youth with mental health conditions.

SANDRA MILLER: OK. Thank you Joann, and thank you Marsha. First, I would like to just talk a little bit about the transition services in Delaware, and how we operate here in our state. We have transition services offered statewide, of course. We have VR counselors. We have eight VR counselors throughout the state, who are actually assigned to the different school districts, the charter schools, and the private schools. So, they work, each week they actually have scheduled time that they spend in the high schools where they are able to meet with the students, meet with the staff at the school, and do the vocational planning and exploration prior to them exiting from high school.

The school actually provides our counselors with a referral. And, historically, has been in the fall of their senior year. They also provide us with supporting documents, so we can utilize that information for eligibility, determinations, and that sort of thing. So, we have been working with seniors, and we've had this process in place for quite some time. With the new law with the Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act, and the focus on transition, we really are trying to shift our focus to get in a little earlier. We have always recognized that it's important to start this process, the vocational exploration and planning, with students at an earlier age.

So, this fall we actually had the counselors start working with juniors. The schools have started to refer students in their junior year. So, the counselor are working double time right now in order to work with the juniors and seniors. But, we feel as though this is really going to be important, especially given the new focus in WIOA. With that, we have started a college counselor pilot position.

So, with our community college, we have one community college in Delaware, and it operates throughout the state. So, in our northern county, we have a college counselor who is working specifically with the students who are attending Delaware Technical and Community College. Both of the campus sites in Newcastle county have provided space for this VR counselor to be at the college a majority of the time during the week. So, she can meet, specifically, with the students who are attending and help them acclimate, especially during their first year. But, she'll be there to help them the entire time during school there.

And, really, its one purpose of it was to help decrease the caseload size of our high school transition counselor, so they were able to get in to do more meaningful work with the juniors. But, it's also a way to emphasize more preparation, and to retain more students who are attending college, and are meeting some challenges. It's somebody there on the campus providing support to them individually.

So, Marsha went over some of the career pathway strategies that have been shown to be successful, and are important to include in the career planning with students and youth who have mental health conditions. Why are we using these? Really, we're finding that we really need to increase opportunities for youth. So, many youth, if they are not provided with opportunities to explore careers, or to even get some work based experiences, they're making decisions on very little information that they have, which doesn't necessarily end up being the best way to plan for a career in the long run.

By working with them earlier, and by providing additional support, we are able to identify their strengths and their challenges, and help them become more aware of those things, and plan around those things. Help them understand their disability, and become better advocates on their behalf in regard to the accommodations that they need.

So, we can provide additional support, and engage youth in the planning process, especially if we can do that at an earlier age it's making a big difference in regard to how well prepared they are by the time they leave high school. So, if we can engage them in the planning process it helps them to explore their options, and they're making much more informed decisions. So, hopefully they will engage with us. They will get to know the service providers better, the schools better, they'll understand the services that they're eligible for, and they will stay in those services. Whether that be staying in high school. We know, based on what Marsha presented earlier, that there is a high dropout rate. Helping them to engage in services and see what their options are when they leave high school, hopefully, will keep them in high school and see the value of graduating.

Whether they're working with any kind of public agency, their services, seeing the value in remaining with those services. If we can get them engaged and, help them understand the kind of support so we can provide, and how we can work with them. They can see the value in remaining with those services. And, then again, in education. If they choose to go on for education or employment, helping them to retain what it is that they are engaged in is very, very important.

So, one of the strategies that we have here Delaware is Supported Employment. We have a program called Early Start to Supported Employment. It is, typically, for individuals who have cognitive disabilities. But, as I'm sure many VR professional have noticed, we have more and more individuals coming to vocational rehabilitation who have multiple disabilities. So, it may not be that their primary disability is a mental health condition, but after getting to know than working with them more we realize that there are multiple disabilities that haven't even been addressed. Or, it's not what they consider their primary disability, but certainly is impacting their ability to move forward with their planning.

So, Early Start to Supported Employment is a program that we have implemented. It's two years, we start the process two years before they exit from high school in order to make sure that they are hooked up with the state services that they need, or any of the provider agencies that are part of process. We start the assessment process, we get engaged with the high school. So, it's a team approach to providing Supported Employment started while they're still in school.

We have the local school agencies, we have the Department of Education, we have our providers, we have our other public state agencies as well as DVR, who are all part of the team to help the individuals explore career opportunities, and then start the development process.

And, we work out the funding behind the scenes, depending on how that needs to be. We've all come to the table to say, you know, it's important to engage them in the service prior to graduation, because if they leave high school, oftentimes, they're not hooked up with the services that they need, and then we may never get them hooked up with those services. So, employment becomes something that they may eventually come back to, but there's so many years gap in between, that they have lost a lot of the routine in the skills that they learned what they were still in high school, and it is a much more difficult process to engage them back in that process.

So, the Early Start to Supported Employment program has been extremely successful. Many of the students are now finding employment prior to even leaving high school, or at least very shortly after they leave high school. So, it's been a very positive process for us here in Delaware. We also have a Support Education program which is [INAUDIBLE], which I referenced earlier.

With this, we have the college counselor position. She actually, will attend the Supported Education program along with the instructor at Deltech, and the two tutors. There's a Math and an English tutor. They offer a class twice a week for two hours, and the students from DVR who test into the basic or pretext classes are eligible to participate in this program.

So, now, with our college counselor there, we have almost like a mini IET team that's there at the college who is able to help support the individual. And, one of the things that's been really nice about it is that early in the semester when this first started, there were students who would come in, and they'd talk to the instructor of the Support Education program and say, I'm not getting this accommodation, I'm not getting that accommodation, only to find out that they had never had a conversation with the ADA coordinator.

So, we have the VR counselor and the instructor at Deltech who are now able to then assist this individual, and understand what they need to do when they're in college in order to advocate on their behalf. Now, this has been working with our transition counselors, but they are, so much of the transition counselors who are working with the high schools, so much of their time is spent in the high schools that there's been a big disconnect in to the support that someone who's new to college really needs. And, our capacity to be able to provide that level of support.

So, this college counselor position is there to support, not only to support the education program, and to really strengthen the partnership with the community college. But also, to assist the first year students. And then, for however long they're at the school in participating in the additional supports that they need. Advocating for the accommodations that they need, understanding how some accommodations in high school may or may not actually translate to the same in college, and just the stress of being in college for the first time. Understanding and navigating through that whole system.

And, in some cases, they'll realize, in that first year, that maybe what they want to do, and what they are in college do are not the same thing. And, so, the VR counselor and instructor and tutors are actually having conversations with the students and what other kind of opportunities are available. So, it's a really good partnership, and it's new. We just started it this Fall, so we're excited to see, over the course of the next year, how well the students are going to do. Because, really, the purpose of it is to provide additional support to students. But, also, to help the college retain the students, as well as help our DVR consumers make it through, and be successful in their educational setting.

In addition, we have different programs related to work based learning experiences. We have the Start on Success program, is one of the strategies that we have implemented. It is a program provided by Humana, which is a provider agency out of Baltimore.

They have a long history of providing this program in Baltimore, and in the counties surrounding, it where they actually go in to the high schools, and recruit students to do an internship for the last 16 weeks prior to graduation. The program takes place while they're still in school. They are working about 15 hours a week in a business, whether that be during the school day, if they're able to get out of school for a certain amount of time, or at the end of their school day. And, there are employment specialists who float around and job coach them while they are in the business. So, they work with four different businesses in Newcastle county. And, the students receive a stipend so they are getting a paycheck.

They also have a classroom setting every two weeks where they learn about employment readiness. How to manage a budget. What's appropriate to do at work? Those soft skills. Those types of things. And then, they couple that along with the internships. And, at the end, they work with that employment specialist that they've know now for 16 weeks, and that person has been helping them to find employment once they graduate from high school.

So it's really, this program in particular, is extremely important for students who are, oftentimes, at risk of dropping out. Many of them have mental health conditions, and maybe have not, they're struggling in high school, they just want to get out there, they want to earn a paycheck. And, they don't understand how important it is for them to complete school, because it's a struggle for them. And, this program has really helped the students understand how valuable it is to complete school, but then also be able to get that work experience. Because, in order for them to participate they have to be attending high school.

So, this has been a really great program and we're in the process of expanding it right now. Because of the Workforce Innovations and Opportunity Act, we wanted to respond to the pre-employment transition services that they reference, and that Marsha referenced earlier as well, the job exploration work based learning experiences, post-secondary education, readiness, and instruction in self advocacy.

We have a big mission in regard to providing students, high school students, while they're still in high school, opportunities to receive these kinds of services. And, although we were doing them before, much of those services were happening closer to the time that they were leaving high school, and then after. And, not as much was happening with the younger age.

So, last summer we put out an RFP, and we asked community providers and different programs to develop programs related to the five pre-employment transition services. And, we had 11 programs that were approved, and offered over the summer. A majority of them were related to internships right in a business for students to actually receive work based experiences, and to get paid.

They coupled a lot of those experiences with, either on the job coaching, or soft skills training, or some type of skills training. Whether it be customer service, we had a culinary arts and urban gardening summer camp that was offered while students also worked. There was a program on post-secondary education and preparation for that, where students were able to live on campus at the University of Delaware for five weeks, participate in college level classes and receive the support that they would expect to need when they left high school, and then if they were to go on to college.

And, so, they got to take a look at what there IAP was in high school, and how that might look in college, and really learn how to ask for the right accommodations, and those types of things. So, overall, we had some really very successful pilot programs. We had many students who actually became employed because of their success on their internship. As well as some students were learning what they were doing in high school, and the accommodations they're getting in high school would not necessarily translate to college. So, they needed to take a look at what were they going to do in order to ensure they could be successful in college, and what kinds of supports could a college provide them related to what they were getting in high school.

So, they had to learn all about that, and advocate on their own behalf to do those things. But, there were some really great supports provided. We had a meeting with the different school districts, and charter schools in Delaware, with a partnership that I have with the Department of Education. There were some schools who we're talking about transition, and how things were working for their students. They said they had students who participated in the summer programs who came back transformed. That the experiences that they received gave them such an education on their career opportunities, and just understanding what a business was looking for, and that the students really came back transformed after just, in many cases, just six weeks of this kind of experience.

So, we really felt that they were successful. And, I think what is important is that oftentimes students with mental health conditions or students with disabilities at all are either geared very much on being successful, completing all their academics, and graduating. Or, getting to the point where they can get out of high school, that they're, oftentimes, they don't have the opportunity to explore extracurricular activities, or work experiences. They're not getting the part time jobs, necessarily, that many of their peers are getting.

And, leaving high school without that experience is certainly not helping them in terms of their long term planning, and Marsha referenced it earlier. Having those work experiences, especially if we can get them paid work experiences while they're still in high school, is a huge predictor for their ability to be able to get that kind of work, and to earn money after high school.

So, I think we are looking to do these again, because they were very successful.

And then, overall, just looking at providing students with more opportunities for work experiences and internships while they are in school. So, although the pilot programs were great, and Start on Success is great, and we also have a couple Project Search Programs for a limited number of students.

We have many others who still need to have these opportunities. So, our transition counselors are working very hard to look at how we can now support them to get some more temporary experiences while they're still in high school. But then, also be planning for their longer term career goals prior to leaving high school. Which, I think all play together to make them a better, more prepared employee in the future.

We also have some youth oriented engagement practices. One, of course, is that we are just trying to get our VR counselors into the high schools at an earlier age, because of the new law. The Workforce Innovations and Opportunities act, and the need to provide them with pre-employment transition services earlier than we were typically able to do it. So, we have everything that I talked to already.

But, we also are developing a Delaware Young Adult Advisory Council with the support from the University of Massachusetts Medical School. We have an individual who has developed the council, she's doing outreach right now. It's really an advisory council related to what Marsha spoke about earlier. Getting services in Delaware that are relevant to youth to engage them in the services, and to make them relevant. And, to also make it easier for them to access these services. There's a big disconnect from the youth services to adult services. And, helping young adults not only access them, but then make it easier for them to continue with the services.

But, in order to do that, we need to know, from them, what is going to be important, what's going to be relevant.

So, we have a young adult who's actually the one who's facilitating this council with the support from others. But, she is essentially reaching out and she's using all the social media. That's important. She's engaging students where they're at, engaging young adults where they're at, and outreaching to them so that they can come and have their voice heard, and really change the way that services are offered here in Delaware.

So, we're excited. We just got that started, we've only had one meeting so far, but we're very hopeful that this is going to be successful, and has been so far. In addition, in partnership with the Department of Education, DVR is beginning to support a student leadership initiative. We had a meeting last month with a group of students, they were representing schools from throughout the state. And, really, it's interesting, because, their feedback to us regarding what they wanted, what it was about high school that they wanted more was being more involved in their IET's. And, really, learning more about exploring career options. What work could really be for them, as well as independent living.

So, they are very focused on what is relevant to them right now. And, also recognize that what they do in high school is going to help them as they get out of high school. So, it was interesting to get their feedback, because although, as professionals, we oftentimes think we know what they, they were so much more able to explain to us the importance to them about these things that we think are important. They were able to explain it in a way that I just didn't expect these individuals to talk about. Some of them were ninth graders, and it was just really good to get their own feedback.

So, they recognized that oftentimes, as they're sitting in their IEP meetings, they're not really engaged in the entire process, and they really feel that they need to be. I think, also, it's important to note that many of them feel as though the schools are not necessarily working with them in regard to the mental health conditions that they're experiencing. Oftentimes, they're being told, or they're not being told to get over it, but that's the feeling that they get from the school. And, it's difficult to engage the students if that's the message that's being sent.

So, what had some of the center using this career pathway strategies? And, I've sort of mentioned this already. But, increasing engagement, exploration and planning, getting the students involved to talk about what it is they want, and what it is that they need is extremely important.

Again, I sort of spoke about this, but we think we know what they want, but until we really get to know them and talk to them about what their options are, and before they really here what are the opportunities are. They're not that engaged in the process. If we are pushing them through, and not really hearing what they have to say then they don't have the buy in, and they're not going to stay engaged in that process.

We are definitely seeing, and we've gotten the feedback from the schools, that through the summer pilot programs with the students who engaged in work experiences prior to leaving high school. And, with those, we have more time to work with, in regard to self-determination and advocacy. They are more prepared for their future, they're staying in contact with us, we're retaining them in the places we needed too. Whether that be they're staying in high school, they're staying in contact with the service providers, whoever that might be. From our perspective it's the counselor.

But, there are staying in contact with us. So, when they leave high school they're not gone. They are they're staying in contact, and we can continue to work with them. And, again, we need to look at developing services that are relevant to their needs. So really being able to listen to what it is that they need, engaging them at an earlier age is really important.

Challenges and some lessons that we've learned in regard to utilizing these strategies. In many cases, I feel very lucky working in Delaware. We have a relatively small state, and our agency collaboration extremely strong. We have excellent partnerships, we have a lot of collaborations, and we work very closely, DVR works very closely with other state agencies. We work closely with the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, the Division of Developmental Disability Services, we work very closely with the Department of Education, the local school districts, and many of our providers are community colleges or universities. We work and have a lot of partnerships with them.

But, it's difficult, because we all have our own policies, and procedures, and expectations that we need to manage. In addition, we have different priorities. So, although we are all feeling as though we're on the same page as we're moving forward, sometimes our priorities can be in conflict And so, trying to work through that can be kind of difficult. Ultimately, the benefit of having a multi-agency collaboration outweighs the challenges in pretty much every case. So, it's certainly worth the effort.

We've been tasked with providing more services to more people, and we don't have any additional resources to do it. So, we have to come up with creative strategies around how to do that. Although many people think that this new WIOA and the pre-employment transition services has provided state VR agencies with additional funding, it's actually utilizing the money we already received, and just taking a portion of it and using it with individuals who, typically, we're not spending that amount money on.

So, it's really trying to be creative and figure out a way to spend the money wisely, so that we are doing more of the preventative types of interventions and strategies, as opposed to spending the money without much thought, and then having to spend even more money at the other end because we didn't prepare them well before they left high school. We didn't prepare them well as a young adult.

We need to spend the money wisely so that we are doing better planning, and individuals are more prepared as they're leaving high school, and as they enter adulthood so that they are able to move forward and be successful in their career goals. It's been difficult here in Delaware to access the youth, and to engage them in this process. In many cases, these disabilities are hidden. The medical conditions are hidden, or there's a stigma, and they are not necessarily identified as easily as someone with another type of disability. So, outreach to them has definitely been more difficult. Creating services and supports that are safe and let them know that they're going to be listened to and heard is extremely important.

Again, shift in services. We really are finding that they need to get in at a younger age, and start developing those relationships early is extremely important. Training and planning. Certainly, having everybody be on the same page, especially related to working with different agencies for different reasons. Keeping everybody trained and understanding how we all work together, what we all do, and just being able to plan for all the different types challenges that we come across can be very tough to do.

But, it's worth the time, and ultimately you have a much stronger process when you can do that. Again, like I said before, creativity and flexibility. It's very important to make sure that we're thinking of all the different options. And, sometimes, we just have to get out there and start trying some things.

Although, in Delaware, many of the services that I've discussed were not developed specifically for students or young adults with mental health conditions, they are successful. They are programs that are very successful, and we are finding that it's a great way to provide those additional supports, and make sure that everyone has access to the services. So, many of these strategies are certainly shown to be successful, and great strategies for any individual with a disability. But, even more so for individuals with mental health conditions.

JOANN STARKS: Thank you very much, Sandy. And, thank you Marsha too, for all the great background information. Now, we will turn to the topic of practice guidelines. One important goal of our webcast series is to understand the potential application of practice guidelines in VR service delivery. So, let's pick up that discussion here.

Our first question is, do you believe that practice guidelines, or written guides, would be a helpful tool for VR practitioners to apply career pathways strategies to support the employment of transition age youth with mental health conditions. I want to turn to our presenters for their response.

SANDRA MILLER: Yes, I definitely think it's a good idea

JOANN STARKS: Marsha?

MARSHA LANGER ELLISON: Well, I would second that. I think Sandy has much more experienced than I about guidelines, and how VR counselors might use them. But, I mean, of course the topic definitely needs explication and dissemination.

JOANN STARKS: Great. So, now let's move on to the next question. What type of information should such practice guidelines include?

Sandy?

SANDRA MILLER: So, I think, first we want to look at why it's important to give this group of young adults special attention. And, we sort of talked about it throughout the course of the webinar, but certainly we're seeing an increase in the number of individuals who have mental health condition come to VR services. The disability is often hidden, and we've gotten a lot of feedback from some of the young adults that say it's not necessarily taken seriously, or they're being told to get over it. That sort of thing.

So, there's definitely a stigma still there related to that. They're not necessarily getting the services that they need while they're still in high school. Or, even when they're out of high school. There's a lack of services, or a disconnect in services as we mentioned earlier. If they're accessing services as a child, or child mental health services, and then they turn 18 there's a disconnect. Often times, either they're not interested, or they're not able to access the services as an adult. Or, it's confusing and they don't know how to.

So, then they fall off the radar in many cases. Sometimes, individuals can be difficult to engage. Some of that is the disability. I know Marcia referenced this earlier. They may not show up to appointment's, they may be more withdrawn, and oftentimes, because of the way that VR often does business, we're looking at is that an indication of their lack of motivation, or something like that? So, sometimes we're making assumptions about those behaviors that are not accurate at all.

So, we really need to take a look at educating more of our professionals so that they understand the disability better. Also, it's really important to provide the services, and to have tools that are going to help engage the young adults in services. Keep them in school, whether that be high school, college, or keep them in services so that with their receiving assistance for careers and stuff like that, they're actually engaging and staying with us.

I think the kind of information that should be included really needs to be practical, tangible information. So, having something out there that's going to talk about not just best practices, not just what does the data show, but also promising practices and strategies.

How do we do outreach, and how do we engage these young adults?

How do we actually provide skill development related to the personal, the employment, and the educational skill based needs that Marsha discussed earlier? In many cases in Delaware, I think, many of the programs that I mentioned are coupling some of the employment aspects and exploration. But, they're also including all of these skills based needs training to make it more practical as the person is actually in a situation. Whether that be in the supported education classroom at Deltech, in a pilot program where they're doing an internship, or in the Start on Success program. You need to take what is relevant to them, right then, and help them pull it all together in regard to how this is impacting them on a personal level through work and also their education.

And then, just other models that are being used by state VR agencies. Across the country we all operate a little differently, although we technically are all kind of following the same rules, we have a lot of different models. And, they work very well for some, and are not necessarily as practical for others given the makeup of their state, or the nature of their region. It's just important to have some examples out there, because I think if we can start with models that are working, that we can say, yes these are actually very successful. Even if it's a small part of one state that can replicate that, that's important. So, it may not be a statewide effort in every case, but I think anything that's out there that we know is working, then another state could then take away and use with their VR counselors is very important.

JOANN STARKS: Thank you very much, those are some great points. Marsha, is there anything you'd like to add?

MARSHA LANGER ELLISON: No. Very well said, Sandy, that was great.

SANDRA MILLER: Thank you.

JOANN STARKS: Let's move on. Now, who should be involved in developing the practice guidelines? Marsha, do you want to take this one?

MARSHA LANGER ELLISON: Sure. So, you know our knowledge translation efforts and implementation science shows us that it is the end users of the services it that you mean to develop that should inform how the services are designed.

So, in this case, youth with mental health conditions really must be consulted, and brought into the guideline development practice. I think that the developers will learn a lot by speaking directly with young people, and will result in a much more relevant product.

Of course, the end users are the VR practitioners and VR agencies who are delivering the services themselves. So, I would say, in a similar vein involves some counselors who are directly providing services to young people, and can speak about the actual experience of doing so, and what is needed. We always hope that researchers are consulted. There is an opportunity to develop a consistent outcome measures, consistent intervention strategies, which would all help researchers to be able to establish the guidelines as being effective. In that case, help their supported dissemination of those guide lines. And, youth organizations, similarly as directly individual use, any youth advocacy organizations would be able to speak well to the needs of that population.

JOANN STARKS: Thank you. Sandy, do you have anything you'd like to add?

SANDRA MILLER: No, I think Marsha pretty much covered it. I think that's a very wide range of individuals who need to be part of it. And, I think also looking at, again, going back to how different parts of the country operate a little differently, and have access to different resources, and taking that into consideration. So, having perspectives from all over it would be very helpful as well.

JOANN STARKS: Well, thank you very much, both Marsha and Sandy. That, I think, will conclude our discussion today. But, I would like to ask both of you if you have any final remarks that you'd like to share with our audience. Marsha, do you want to go first?

MARSHA LANGER ELLISON: Well, I guess I would really like to applaud AIR and SEDL for having this webinar. This particular population of people with disabilities, young people and young adults with serious mental health conditions are really often overlooked. It's a hidden disability as Sandra said. So, any effort to improve their outcomes is desperately needed. So, I'm very grateful for this opportunity to profile this group.

JOANN STARKS: Well, thank you so much. Sandy, anything else you'd like to add?

SANDRA MILLER: I totally agree with what Marsha said. I appreciate very much to be included in on this discussion, and agree that this is a group that we need to pay particular attention to, and I look forward to more information.

JOANN STARKS: Well, thank you both very much. We really do appreciate the information you brought to a very important topic. And, we hope that our listeners have found this webcast to be very informative today. I want to remind everyone that today's event is one of a series of webcasts on knowledge translation from VR research to service delivery.

Also, we intend these webcasts will foster discussion in a community of practice, where this dialogue among researchers, educators, practitioners, policymakers, and other stakeholders, can continue to inform and serve those dedicated to vocational rehabilitation, and its goals to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities. To stimulate more discussion, we invite listeners to contact us. To provide your input on today's webcast, to share your thoughts on future webcast topics, and to continue the dialogue by participating in the community of practice. We'd like to hear from you, because your views can inform and shape our future work.

Please contact us at the email address shown on the screen, ktdrr@air.org.

We also appreciate your thoughts and perceptions about today's webcast by completing a brief online evaluation. The link is here at the bottom of the last page of the PowerPoint file. And, everyone who registered will also get an email with a link to this evaluation form. The archived audio video file, and a written transcript of the webcast will be available and posted on the webcast page.

So, one again, I want to thank our presenters today, Marsha Ellison and Sandra Miller. As well as Cindy Cai, Emma Hinkens, Ann Outlaw, and all of our colleagues at the Center on KTDRR and AIR for their support. We also appreciate the support from NIDILRR to carry out these webcasts and another activities. So, on this final note I'd like to conclude today's webcast. We look forward to your participation in our next event. Thank you, and good afternoon.