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CSAVR Spring Conference

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>> Folks, we're going to get started in about 1 minute. If you could begin to take your seats.

(Pause. )

>> Hey, good morning everyone! Good morning everyone.

FROM THE FLOOR: Good morning.

>> Good morning. It's so good to see everyone here today. It is great to be together again in Bethesda to see so many smiling faces, so many people that we know and have worked with throughout the years; and ‑‑ also, have an opportunity to meet some new directors and new staff and I'm really pleased to be able to introduce some of my new team members here as well from Florida. New deputy director Robin, just taking a points of you‑all will have a chance to meet with her and also our bureau chief and some of our attorneys here for the attorneys meeting this week. Again, it's really good to be together again here in Bethesda.

I want to really say welcome to everyone. I want to say thank you to everyone. I want to thank the CSAVR team, for putting together for us, another engaging and educational training for us in the spring. If you look over the agenda we've got a lot of things going on in the next few days including a visit to the hill. We have an opportunity for attorneys to get together and network. We'll have opportunities for net point of contacts to meet. We have opportunities for ‑‑ I know there's ROI groups and all kinds of things that are going on. Social Security training, things that are going on dut u but, again, a lot of great things going on this week. We'll also get chance to marry from our federal partners even starting this morning with our assistant secretary who we'll be introducing me in just a little while. We want to say welcome federal partners university partners and others who have joined us for this conference here in the spring.

We also want to thank the hotel, again, for hosting us. They always do such a wonderful job. Making sure that we have all the amenities and things that we have need of. So we appreciate you all hosting us again, on this spring.

And so without any further ado from me, I want to introduce you all to Steve Wooderson our CEO. First time meeting him he's going to give us updates from the Washington perspective maybe give you updates to our key initiative. Vision 2020. So we'll turn it over to you, Steve.

>> Steve: Thanks Robert.

[APPLAUSE]  
and I appreciate that invitation but let's start off‑with Sue to give us an opportunity to kind of hear a little bit about where we are in this great state. And to greet us from the state of Maryland.

>> Sue: Good morning everyone. Thank you Steve.

FROM THE FLOOR: Good morning.

>> Just my pleasure to join Steve and Robert in welcoming to you to Regions 3. Region three raise your hands! Yes.

[LAUGHTER]

>> Sue: Welcome to Maryland the free state. Maryland miniature all these different things and also to Washington D.C.

If you haven't been here before, I really invite you to enjoy all of the ‑‑ all of the activities in the area. Lots of fine various dining opportunities; museums, places to walk.

If you're into baseball, the Baltimore orioles and the Washington Nationals are playing at home this week! So if you have free time go ahead. Also we're in the midst of cherry blossom season. And I ‑‑ I was on the Internet last night, and the hype was they determined the height of cherry blossom season was Friday. But we're still there. And please, please, please enjoy the cherry blossoms especially when we go to D.C. tomorrow!

Up to the Hill.

But I have to warn you, I didn't know this, but did you know that it is illegal to pick cherry blossoms or branches?

[LAUGHTER]

>> So look, don't touch!

[LAUGHTER]

>> Sue: But, again, welcome! It's so great to see everybody. And have a ‑‑ you know, join me in just having a really, really wonderful conference. Thank you!

[APPLAUSE]

>> Thanks sue. Good morning everybody. Who is happy to be here?   
[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE].

>> Got to be a little more enthusiastic. Really happy to be here right? All right well, we're glad that you're here, and really thrilled to be able to spend some time, with friends, being able to ‑‑ fellowship, being able to network, being able to really get to know one another on a personnel basis in addition to all the professional work we have been about this weekend and for the next few days. How many have been involved in some kind of training or some kind of activity since Saturday? And have been here for a few days? Just give us a wave. So look around.

The work that is about us, has already started.

And I want to say thank you to those that have been involved in getting ready, for the activities of this past weekend.

The state rehabilitation councils. The new directors training, the state director's forum. I know there's been other activities as well; so for some of you, that are out there, you probably are already bleary‑eyed from all the work that you've been about to ‑‑ since the time I've got here but we hope this morning you're refreshed and ready to really dig in for this, our legislative meeting of the year. And really looking forward to all that we have lined out for you this ‑‑ this week.

I ‑‑ I'm being asked to give the Washington update. And to be honest with you, I really had to reflect on what I wanted to say today, because, there had been so many things going on around the country, and I want to be sure that folks know that in ‑‑ in the light of all of the work that all the staff has been involved with, really, our highest priority since we met last, in November, was to continue the cause of vision 2020.

And to be out across the country, to be listening, to be participating, to be engaged in meetings here in Washington, D.C.; and as I really was trying to think about how to ‑‑ how to begin this morning, I thought I ‑‑ I think I just need to stop and reflect back on what where we are as a profession, in this area of our vision, 2020, initiative.

Last, yesterday afternoon, many of our state directors were involved in walking through a review of the activities that we had been working on for the last several months. And to really come to that point, where we are now, and saying, "We are ready to put into action are a number of activities that are driven by the input that we have had and received over these last weeks and months that we've been working with you."

The community, and working here on the Hill as well. For all of us to reflect on the strategy a vision of 2020. As we approach our 100 year anniversary here it is in front of you: That vision VR is driven by commitment to people with disabilities, and ‑‑ businesses at the intersection of disabilities, career readiness and competitive integrated employment.

We have celebrated the fact that in WIOA we now recognize that we serve two customers. We've been working in that mindset for many years. But it was great when WIOA was passed that it was identified in law; and for many of the work ‑‑ many of you the work that you're doing out across the country, is something to really celebrate! We've had the opportunity to see the things that are happening in developing new initiatives, with our customers.

Individuals with disabilities, and businesses as well.

And to be able to see that we truly are behaving today in a way that shows that our strategy is right and proper. That we are looking forward; that we are actually involved in innovative practices today. Across the country, we are making that happen by following the principles of vision 2020: That we are really keen on building careers and retaining talent; Kathy and I have been so honored to be in many of your states, and listening to the business work that you're doing. And developing relationships with businesses, and finding new and unique ways to interconnect, the talent and opportunities for our consumers.

Innovating solutions: John and I have been involved in so many round‑tables three of them to this point and really hearing from you, and from your partners, the work that you're doing in coming together, and together, identifying ways to do things new.

And differently.

And to make a difference in the lives of the individuals we touch. And also, improving the opportunities for the businesses that we work as ‑‑ as well. Customizing services and expertise. It's been great Theresa and I be able to be part of so many of your consumer round‑tables consumers talking about here's what vocational rehabilitation is doing for me. You know, sometimes we find ourselves walking into environment where those that we serve, are there to ‑‑ as we say back home "fuss" as us a little bit there's times for us to listen to those kinds of comments as well.

But by and large, we have found ourselves hearing from you ‑‑ from your consumers, the work that is being done is powerful, and it's changing their lives.

And then last, leading and engaging a collaborative strategy. You know, Rita and I have had so many opportunities to work with folks here, in the beltway. And as we talk to partners and we're listening to those that may even advocate for services that push us, and ‑‑ and cause us to really have to step outside our comfort zone, it's ‑‑ it's encouraging, and it's uplifting, for us to hear that the work that's being done in the field, our partners are recognizing that as well.

So that was really where I wanted to start our conference today, is to say to you, thank you for the work that you're doing; and the ‑‑ the ‑‑ the feedback that we're getting from just not here in the beltway, but across the country, that things are working well.

We have opportunities to improve. We have opportunities to create and to innovate; and it's clear that we, as a profession, are making that happen. So let us say thank you to the state directors for the work that you're doing across the country. For those of you that are in the room, as senior staff, thank you for keeping your state directors in line, because.

[LAUGHTER]

>>> It takes somebody to be sure that work is getting done right? For the other partners that are ‑‑ that are in the room as well. We're thankful for the technical assistance centers that are helping us across the country improve, the work and look for ways for us to improve our work, in many different ways. And the other partners we have, that are providers, and other ‑‑ that are working with us in our great community.

I want to say thank you to the vision 2020 leadership team. I ‑‑ I feel a little guilty, because any time I send an e‑mail or I send a call, I feel like I'm making them do extra work. But to a person, the responsiveness, their ability to be engaged on top of their real job, is pretty incredible. So I want to say thank you to Joe, thank you to Robert, thank you Lisa, who is not here, and then the ‑‑ the former director of VR in Nebraska mark Schultz who is very much a part of our leadership team and from a staff perspective Kathy has been serving in that leadership role as well.

The Executive Committee, we've worked them really hard over the last few months. In January we were very much involved in a session that was led by a partner of ours. That really helped us bring a lot of the information we've been working on and begin to put into some kind of structure an opportunity for us to begin to really identify how do we go about prioritizing these tasks?

How do we go about resourcing them and what are some of our next steps?

Yesterday, the directors ‑‑ we expanded on that Executive Committee work, and the directors were a part of the prioritizing of those many, many tasks and I am looking forward for you‑all to see much of the work that is being done.

Your ‑‑ your staff is pretty small.

When you think about the work that's ‑‑ that's being done and we can't do it alone. I want to say thank you to the many partners that we have had specific to vision 2020, but expanding that on just building the capacity of our work in general. I want to say thank you to them. I want to give shout out to Ron, thank you for the work you're doing on the win tack contract. I don't know if Danielle is in the room. At the registration table, the work that she's been doing ‑‑ she's doing to help ‑‑ is okay for us to say this Kathy? And Rita? Us old dogs that don't quite get the social media stuff. You know.

For the work that she is doing. So expanding the staff capacity.

But beyond that, there are many others that you may not even know about that are helping us continue to ‑‑ there's Danielle. Thank you Danielle I do see you back there!

The many things that go on behind the scenes, to keep this organization running.

We've got folks that are helping us with everything from increasing our transparency, with our finances, to being sure that ‑‑ that our audits are clean; to ensure that we're able to pay bills; to ensure that we've got legal counsel, when we need to; to be sure that ‑‑ as we develop marketing materials it's reviewed and presented in a very clear and appropriate and concise way.

Some of those partners will be here tonight at our reception and hopefully, you'll be able to shake their hands and say thank you for the work that they're doing as well.

And then.

I ‑‑ I can't say enough to Rita Kathy John and Theresa for the work that they have done over these last several months since we last met. Where we last met.

Where was it last? I don't even remember. Last fall!

But many of you were there.

But.

[LAUGHTER]

>> These folks are ‑‑ road Warriors. They are committed. They're passionate. They're devoted. They're dedicated.

They work hours and hours and hours. But more than that, it's the reality that they care about our profession.

And the work that they're doing is to further your cause; and to respond to your needs, and so for me, if you wouldn't mind taking a moment saying thank you to our staff for the work they're doing. So thank you, all, very much.

[APPLAUSE]

>> So the next part of my job is to kind of make sure that we have some logistics taken care of for the next couple of days. We hope many of you will join us tomorrow morning in Dukson106 if you've got been to the hill before find somebody who knows how to get there because there's plenty of folks that have been there before and know exactly where we're going. I don't think we were in Dirkson last year we were in 50 last year? I don't recall. 106, and ‑‑ and best way for you to get there is you jump on the red line. And plan on being there by about 8:45. We have a breakfast for you. And then we will start with some hill staffers coming in around 9:15 or so; and we'll be looking forward to a little bit after the hill staffers are ‑‑ are there.

To be giving out some awards.

Lifetime achievement, to Senator Orin hatch who has been an absolute champion for our cause, for many, many years. We're going to miss his service.

Distinguished service award, to Senator bob Casey, and then Kathy and staff will be presenting the business partner of the year to Kwik Trip. So plan your travel accordingly. Many of you will go by metro some will have other methods of transportation, and if you don't go by metro, just remember it takes longer than you think it will take you to get to the Hill.

Okay?

So that's kind of the word, particularly during cherry blossom season. I haven't been in the train in the last few days but I understand it's been very, very busy.

A few other announcements before we recognize our state directors and then get into our keynote speaker. I want to say thank you, sue, to your staff that joined us that helped us at the refrigeration table. Jessica, Janice and Kim helping out with Theresa, and with Danielle and others that are out there helping you get registered. Thank you Maureen, are you here, Maureen? Thank you for partnering with us. GW. You'll see on the inside of your cover that GW is our partner for CRC credits.

I think we still need to do a little bit more before ‑‑ is there paperwork here and ready Maureen? It is here. So when you are needing to get your CRC credits go to the desk right? Okay.

So thank you to George Washington, Maureen, your staff, for helping us out with that. I understand that Oklahoma DRS, you are the ones that helped us with Braille. I want to say thank you to you.

If you... we've done something different this year for those that are participating in regional meetings ‑‑ the Executive Committee suggested ‑‑ and we think it's a good idea for CSAVR to cover the cost of your regional meetings this year.

But you had to have signed up and... ordered a meal.

Am I saying that right? Sa ‑‑ is it making sense?

So on the back of your name tag I think whatever you ordered, is there for those that did order something.

And magically there's going to be lines showing up somewhere. You can tell I have no idea what I'm talking about right?

[LAUGHTER]

>> I wish T were in the room she had pull me out of this one but you've got a ‑‑ whatever you've ordered somewhere there's a line with that food item somewhere. So look super‑‑ something somewhere find that something had somewhere and go wherever you're supposed to be from there. And tell Theresa that I delivered perfectly on that particular announcement. Will you? So I kind of got to pull myself out of the name tag there.

There are a number of other activities that you may or may not be aware of. But when ‑‑ when we have our spring conferences it's not uncommon for us to have a lot of partners friends colleagues other organizations ask to have space and meeting at the same time. If you have been asked to be a part of that and it's not on the agenda that information is at the registration table as well so be sure and get that information and be ‑‑ to be clear on where you're supposed to be at the right time.

But for sure, tomorrow, while many of us are at the Hill the VR attorney network training is going to be going on here.

The Social Security cost reimbursement training, and, again, if you are involved in some other kind of partners meeting check at the registration desk for that information.

So now it's my honor to take a moment and welcome the new state vocational rehabilitation directors that have come on board, since last November. This is always a little bit uncertain because we think that we have everybody. So we haven't announced your name and you're new since November. Please let us know. We want to recognize you, at the ‑‑ at the break this morning.

So please make yourselves known to your colleagues, as we said a few moments ago, one of the best things we have about this opportunity is to get to know one another and to network and have time to build those relationships. And we want to be sure that we recognize you.

Virginia general has a new director. Kathy, are you here?

>> She's in route!

>> She is in route. All right. Well, we're thrilled to have Kathy on board. She's been in the ‑‑ in the field for many years. Hawaii combined Maureen. Give us ‑‑ there you go thank you give Maureen a round of applause.

[APPLAUSE]

>> All right.

D.C. combined has a new director David. I'm not sure if David is here yet? All right. So I know that he had a conflict that came up this morning.

New Jersey general and New Jersey blind have acting directors. I don't know if they're here. Or not. David for General, Bernice I don't know if they made it but we had a recent transition in New Jersey and both David and Bernice have been put in the acing role. Libby from Maine. Thank you for being here?

[APPLAUSE]

>> Nebraska Linda you've been here with us all weekend.

I'm sorry.

[APPLAUSE]

>> And New Mexico, Adrian. Way back in the back thank you for stepping back in. If I missed a new state director since November, please let us know. And we'll be sure and recognize you at another time.

Are there any other announcements, Rita? Theresa?

That you can think of. Okay.

So my second great honor is to introduce you to our new assistant secretary.

I pulled his bio off ‑‑ that's what we typically do right? We pull the bio off online and I could read it but let's just start off by saying he comes from with a great reputation.

And honestly, assistant secretary in our community know how important that is for us to be able to at least know that ‑‑ that our friends in the community, are already saying good things about our new assistant secretary. Assistant secretary comes from us after service at the chief council of state school officers, a number of years, serving as their director of special education outcomes.

Comes from the great state of Kentucky, where he served as a special education director.

Probably the greatest thing we can say is that you came directly from the field as a teacher.

We also talked for just a few moments, and although there were a few years' difference in a campus that we both spent some time on, more years than I would like to admit to, to be honest with you, but we actually spent some time in Louisville Kentucky, and we're really thrilled to have you here.

Assistant secretary Collett, looking forward to your comments, and I want you to know these are the finest people in this profession right here and we're looking forward to hearing from you so let's give assistant secretary, a round of applause!

[APPLAUSE]

>> Collett: Thanks Steve. Thanks everyone for an incredible honor to be here today, and I think that my job today is to just share a little bit with you about who I am, and ‑‑ and I ‑‑ I know if I were in your seat I would want to okay here's this new guy.

What ‑‑ what makes him tick? You know, what's on his mind? What are the things that are important to him? I think that during the course of our next 20 minutes or so you will find some things that we share in common, at least I hope that you do.

You know, there's almost nowhere I would rather be than with folks leading work in states. You know, I was telling Sue earlier that I think the only place I can imagine I would rather be would be maybe in a class in a school building with teachers and ‑‑ and principals and students.

But that's not a preference thing. It's just any chance I would ever get to be in a school these days would be a wonderful thing, but other than being with kids and teachers and leaders in buildings there's nothing I enjoy more really and nothing that energizes me more than being people who are leading work in states folks who really know what you're doing and talking about right?

And I was telling Sue earlier that our goal is to ‑‑ I'll talk a little bit about some of that, but, you know, you know what you're doing. You ‑‑ you know the work that you're leading and one of the things I want to try to do is to continue the good progress I think we've had in the past to ‑‑ to try to provide you the flexibility, and opportunity to do the work that you know best how to do; and to try really hard not to get in the way of that. I know that we don't always hit that mark in ways that are probably the best for you, but know that that's something that I'm deeply committed to, I'll talk a little bit more about that in a few minutes.

I'm always glad to recognize our great team at OSERS and many of our RSAs are here today and in front of the room and whatever I do wrong today, is no reflection on them.

It is entirely on me. So just keep that in mind.

I am honored to lead this office. The office of special education and rehabilitative services; and you know well our mission, but one of the things that I've done and we'll continue to do, is even if we know what our mission is, we're going to continue to say it. We're going to continue to make sure that people know that we are committed to improving early childhood; educational and employment outcomes and raise expectations for all people with disabilities and to improve outcomes in their lives and their communities and then ultimately, in our nation.

You know, one of the things I'm continually struck by about OSERS is that we really work to impact across the life of an individual with a disability.

I know you know that, but sometimes it just settles on me again that we really do work every day to try to support states and families, and communities, and employers and we're ‑‑ our work, begins at birth, with ‑‑ with infants with disabilities and all the way across an individual's life.

Through adulthood including post secondary opportunities, and our goal of competitive integrated employment.

So ‑‑ just know that I'm struck by that. It is an amazing opportunity that we have in OSERS to really try to impact across the life of an individual with disability.

Little bit about me: About 16 years ago, I was transitioning from a different career. And I was unemployed.

So one of the things I knew is that I wanted to teach.

But here was the problem: I didn't have any teaching ‑‑ none of the formal teaching preparation courses. I had other degrees but I didn't have that.

And I didn't have any credentials to teach, but I knew I wanted to teach; so what do you do?

Well, what I did is I stopped by the local school district, where we lived.

And my intent was to drop off a résumé. For what, I don't know because it had nothing on it that would have been inviting to anyone looking to hire somebody in a school district.

It was literally about five or six days before the start of the school year.

So early August for us. In Kentucky.

So I dropped by there and it's late summer and a lot of folks are still not there. They're getting the last rays of sunshine before school starts again. So literally, nobody in the building. And I'm walking around trying to find somebody to hand this irrelevant résumé to right?

Well, I didn't think anybody was there so I'm walking out and then, I did meet someone who was there. And it happened to be the assistant principal in the high school.

And he just was there to drop off something, himself, and he could tell that I was lost and trying to find somebody.

And he said, "Can I help you?" Yeah, going to drop off this résumé and he said fine I'll take it and I'll make sure it gets to go where it needs to go I said ‑‑ I didn't say that I said sure you will and I started walking out and then he calls me back and he said, "Hey, come here. He said, you know, I really might call you." And then I'm thinking what in the world did you see on that résumé, with a quick read, that would make you want to call me? Well, here's the reality if I can step out of my story for a minute.

He didn't see anything on that résumé. That would have said hey, this might be a good candidate for an opening I have at the high school.

The reality was he's a high school principal. It's five days before school starts.

Kids are going to show up. And there needs to be someone.

[LAUGHTER]

>> That at least resembles an adult in that classroom!

[LAUGHTER]

>> Now, that's exactly what happened. Really. I mean, that's what it was about.

And so we could talk ‑‑ I talked to a lot of folks sometimes about teacher shortages I won't go there today but that's the reality of school districts, every day. That might not be a long‑term solution, but it might very well be a short‑term answer to something.

Certainly was for me he said I might call ‑‑ I didn't think he would the day after that he did call. He said come in for an interview. I did.

Okay. Now, it's, like, three days before school starts.

And I got the job. Now, what ‑‑ you think about that. There's just ‑‑ there's just no other ‑‑ we ‑‑ there's some ways that I can explain that we'll talk about offline, but man, there was nothing on my résumé, again, that hinted to that.

But, you know, he took a risk, in hiring me, and I got the job; so I began my teaching career, as an emergency certified teacher.

Now, I very quickly, entered a ‑‑ a ‑‑ a courses at the university and very quickly entered a program an alternative route to certification and very quickly become ‑‑ became fully credentialed; so I promised just in case anybody's nervous at this point. I finally did get what I needed to do, to teach kids and ‑‑ and lead work.

But that's how I started into this career. 16 years ago, an individual who is transitioning from another career and who is unemployed.

I mean, I think back about all of the supports and individuals and ‑‑ and circumstances, that came together, and that needed to come together.

Before the reality that I experienced could even be possible.

And it did. And it took a lot of stuff and you guys know a lot about many things having to come together. To make sure an individual has a successful employment outcome.

So then, you know, taught at the high school for a number of years but I did go to the state Department of Education but while I was at the high school, you know, there were a number of things that were really important to me. My focus was on helping students transition to life after high school and I learned a number of things.

I'll tell you just a couple that continue to live with me today. I learned the importance of developing and implementing high‑quality individual education programs.

IEPs. Not IPEs right? But IEPs. They later had some IPEs.

But I learned the importance of developing and implementing high‑quality individual education programs that focused on both ‑‑ and this will be an important note for you because it's part of what makes me tick ‑‑ that focused on both compliance and improving outcomes.

Not one without the other.

Right?

Not one without the other.

You know, if ‑‑ if I've learned anything in looking back over the last 40 some years of education that I've studied about and some of those that I've participated in, while compliance is essential, don't hear me wrong don't misunderstand ‑‑ compliance is essential.

Compliance, by itself, is not sufficient to improve outcomes for kids.

And it's not sufficient to improve outcomes for students transitioning to employment. It's not sufficient to improve outcomes for adult ‑‑ compliance is essential.

But by itself, is insufficient. So it was important to me to develop those plans, those programs that focused on both of those things, simultaneously.

And, again, I had to learn that that's not something I knew how to do or that the school building knew how to do or that the school system as a whole knew how to do by itself.

It was critically important to me, and I learned the importance of collaborating meaningfully, with everyone who had a stake in the life of that child.

And one of my first experiences as a high school teacher was working extremely closely with our local VR counselors.

I learned about vocational rehabilitation services early as a high school teacher.

And understanding those services that students needed, before we were talking about preemployment strategies, we were really still talking about preemployment strategies and doing that work and getting in as quickly as we could as VR counselors and into a building. So we had a great experience with VR counselors and use them as much as they would let me use them to make sure that we were really planning programs for individuals that increased their potential for success.

Well, then, I went to the state Department of Education. I was ‑‑ an exceptional children consultant for a while. And for a couple of years, and my focus there, was also on transition. I got to work with local education agencies, every day, to think about how we could support them to improve graduation rates.

And to decrease dropout rates, to improve post secondary transition and post school outcomes; and there, I continued to work closely with the Department of vocational rehabilitation, not so much with ‑‑ with VR counselors at that time but then state staff, in Kentucky. And just continue to understand the critical importance of working collaboratively and meaningfully, across agencies to ensure that we were ‑‑ increasing potential for folks to have good outcomes.

You know, one of the things I learned while I was there that I want to ‑‑ in some way for ‑‑ to resonate with you, is... I understood that we were all getting better in Kentucky. So the Department of Education was getting better.

You know, voc rehab was getting better. Medicaid was getting better DJJ community‑based services ‑‑ all these other folks were getting better but what we realized finally around the Table 1 day was that we were getting better in isolation.

We weren't getting better collectively. Across our state.

So that dawned on us one day and another day it dawned on us okay Johnny, you called this individual a student. I call them a client. Somebody else said I call them an incarcerated youth; and we went around and we realized we're serving the same individual.

The same families.

And impacting on the same communities.

And it is incumbent on us to figure out how to work together, most meaningfully and collaboratively to ensure they have a good chance at great outcomes in their lives that continues to be something important with me at the state Department of Education I worked really hard along with other peers in other agencies to make sure we did a better job as child serving an individual with disabilities serving agencies to work more collaboratively and meaningfully together in service to them. That continues to be something that I commit to you.

We are eager and excited to continue the great partnership with CSAVR that we've had. And continue the great partnership with you, as individual states, and leaders. But through all the roles I served ‑‑ served in I've learned that meaningful collaboration and effective collaboration with all who have a stake in the life of an individual is critical to the success that we ‑‑ and here's the thing, though ‑‑ that we ‑‑ but most importantly these individuals envision.

Critical to ‑‑ to meaningful collaboration that ‑‑ that they enjoy the success they envision. That's why our partnership with you is so important to meet the needs of our customers. Steve has already mentioned that. Our customers, of course, we're talking about individuals who face barriers to employment including individuals with disabilities but we're also talking about the businesses that employ them; so our partnership with you and ‑‑ and our customers is critical to us.

One more thing about the various roles in which I've served and what it's taught me: It's taught me, again, and, again, that those who are closest to the individual, are in the best ‑‑ the best position to make decisions about their education and employment.

Now, again, I may not always get that right, but I want you to know that that is our commitment to you.

To remember that ‑‑ that those who are closest to the child, or closest to the individual, are in the best position to make decisions about the education and employment of those individuals.

We will work very hard not to overstep our federal role, but more than one thing can be true at the same time. I always say that. But I always say there's another piece to that.

We will work really hard not to overstep our federal role.

But I want you to know we're going to work really hard not to understep it either right? So just because we don't overstep it doesn't mean that you may not need support; that we might be able to figure out how to provide or to broker in some way; but that ‑‑ those would be needs that you have. So I don't want us to overstep our federal role, but I also don't want us to understep it. As assistant secretary in OSERS you can expect that I will ‑‑ and we will ‑‑ continue to be committed to implementing the laws for which we have oversight.

But to ensuring simultaneously, that we continue to focus on raising expectation and improving outcomes for all individuals with disabilities, their families, their communities and the nation. Again, it's not going to be one without the other. It's not going to be a focus on compliance.

Or a focus on improving outcomes.

That's not going to work.

It never has worked. And you know better than anybody that it doesn't.

So we're going to figure out how to call attention to both of those simultaneously, we'll take our lead from you, who do it well every day, we'll learn from you, and we'll continue to call attention to the importance of both of those at the same time.

And one of the thing ‑‑ and I don't know ‑‑ I have to probably hurry with my remarks here, but.... one of the things that I'm saying to the team at OSERS and so far so good ‑‑ I mean, they're the experts. They would tell me if I'm way off track here so far nobody has gotten real nervous.

And I ‑‑ sometimes use my hands to do this so I'll make sure to share what I'm doing, you know, with one hand I'll say, you know, our primary focus is not compliance.

Usually people don't get too nervous with that.

Right?

But hang on. I'll make you nervous in just a second.

[LAUGHTER]

>> Our primary focus is not compliance. Now, that doesn't mean our focus is not compliance.

It ‑‑ I said our primary focus is. Now, when I was in Kentucky, and the Department of Education rightly made a decision in my view, to shift to what they call a results driven accountability, where they weren't just going to make determinations on states based on compliance alone; they were going to fold in results, to that as well. Again, in my view, the right decision at the right time.

But in Kentucky, I used to have to message this at least five or six times a week. I would go somewhere in the state and somebody would say oh, I heard about results driven accountability.

That means we don't have to do compliance anymore!

So my answer was always the same. Whether I was talking to a superintendent a local special ed director a teacher or parent ‑‑ always appropriate, but I would say something like ‑‑ you have completely missed the point.

[LAUGHTER]

>> Right?

Because compliance is not the enemy. Compliance has never been the enemy.

The problem is, when compliance becomes the end... and we somehow convince ourselves that just because we got something ‑‑ we got the boxes checked in the right place, by the right date, to the right person, in the right office, at the right time ‑‑ that somehow, that, alone, means we're successful.

Well, I'm going to suggest to you that it doesn't.

It's critically important. It's essential.

It continues.

But by itself, is insufficient to improve outcomes that we envision and most importantly the individuals we serve and envision our primary focus is noncompliance here's the point where people get nervous I usually raise my other hand my Roseanne hand. I don't raise my right hand like I'm swearing to something right. But with my right hand I'll often say our primary focus is not even outcomes. Hang with me. Right, that's when people start getting nervous that's usually when a quote well show up. Secretary Collett said our primary focus is not outcomes. Just hang on.

Our primary focus is not outcomes as if there was if there was one cookie cutter one size fits all approach to an individual. That's what I can't tolerate. Is that our focus is on some prescribed notion of what an outcome ought to look like, in the life of every single individual.

So our primary focus ‑‑ is not outcomes as I've described it today so what I do is I bring my hands together in the middle and I say let's get on the sage page here. Our primary focus is the individual. Guess what happens? Compliance and outcomes, are in service to the individual.

And I would ‑‑ I know that that's your commitment. That's our commitment. I think that you know as well as I do, that with various issues, and complexities we can often get ‑‑ off in a ditch. One side or the other. And I would suggest to you, if I'm driving down the road and I'm in the left hand ditch or the right hand ditch it doesn't make any difference I'm not on the road.

[LAUGHTER]

>> Collett: So instead of getting in the ditches, let's start there. With what you ‑‑ I know your commitment is ‑‑ and I'm making sure you understand it's my commitment ‑‑ is the individual.

So compliance and outcomes are in service to the individual. The problem happens, in my view, when we ‑‑ when the issue or the complexity or the whatever, becomes the filter right? It becomes the filter.

And we try to somehow see the individual through the filter of the issue.

I'm going to suggest to you to just flip that.

Let's not let the issue or the complexity or whatever we're talking about, be the filter through which we try to see people. Let's flip that. Let's see the issue, through the filter of the individual.

Now, we won't always get that right. I want you to hold us accountable.

When you think we don't.

But that's a commitment.

That we have. And some of the things that we're saying out loud. Well, I'm going to have to hurry. I'm really proud, I really am proud of the progress in OSERS that we've made.

They were an incredible team long before I got there. They'll be an incredible time long after I'm gone, continuing to serve you.

But I'm proud of the progress we've made. In ‑‑ the education of ‑‑ of children with disabilities. Since Congress passed public law 94142, you know, over 40 years ago. Now, IDEA so I'm proud of the progress we've made in the education of individuals with disabilities but I'm also proud of the progress and focus we have through our vocational rehabilitation program on strengthening and improving access to high‑quality jobs and careers through the rehab act of 1973; and, of course, the implementation of the ‑‑ as amended by WIOA. We've got now, four years almost, into WIOA and I think we continue to enjoy incredible opportunities to partner together and to work collaboratively to maximize the employment of individuals and disabilities including those preemployment strategies to students with disabilities that we talked about just a few minutes ago so that they can be truly prepared for a career truly prepared for a positive employment outcome, and gain the meaningful skills that they need in the workplace. And I mentioned this earlier and I'll mention it again.

Kind of around that room in ‑‑ in Kentucky, around with those other agencies those things that dawned on me that we talked about a few minutes ago ‑‑ sticks with me today: And it really is, in my view, incumbent on us, incumbent on you and me ‑‑ the different areas from which we lead. It's incumbent on us to prioritize the needs of our customers.

Individuals with disabilities. Those who have barriers to employment; otherwise, and certainly, the employers who employ them. The needs of our customers in my view, should inform every conversation that we have. And every decision that we make. Again, think about that filter that I talked about a few minutes ago.

You know, my boss, education secretary Betsy DeVos has been clear concerning the individuals that we serve.

I hope you've had a chance to read some things that she said, and to ‑‑ did an op‑ed a couple of months ago I think if you haven't had a chance to read I hope you do. Because she was very clear, in terms of her commitment to ‑‑ to population of ‑‑ of kids and individuals that we serve. That tolerating low expectations, for them has to end.

And that, you know, this notion of a one‑size‑fits‑all approach, it doesn't work for every individual.

And that failure is not something that we deem an acceptable option. On the other hand what we do deem acceptable is that you and I would demonstrate, that we do have hope for them; and that we do believe in them.

And that we're not going to tolerate low expectations. We're not going to accept this notion of failure. And we're not going to perpetuate this notion of a one‑size‑fits‑all approach for every individual.

That's her commitment. That's our commitment and if we get this right ‑‑ and I know that's your commitment. You get this right and you're getting this right every day from where you lead but if we get this right I think we will truly implement strategies that provide individuals the VR services they need.

To be successful. To gain the skills they need. To move into employment. But it will also ‑‑ if we get this right, again, I know that's your commitment. It will also help businesses be successful because they'll be able to hire skilled workers in this labor market and economy that's always changing.

And perhaps in some ways most of all, will continue to all recognize the incredible value that individuals with disabilities bring to the workforce.

Across our workforce, development system.

So I'll leave you ‑‑ kind of with something I say in one way or another every single day: And it's not something you don't know. It is something you know. It's something you're committed to.

But in some ways there's just incredible power in my view to say these things out loud. We all have a stake in the success of the individuals that we serve.

You certainly have a stake in a state ‑‑ as a state director, a state staff providers ‑‑ I think there are attorneys in states, parents, communities, families, the Federal Government ‑‑ the nation, individually:  ‑‑ we all have a stake in the success of individuals that we serve.

But what I want to leave you with is this:

While we all have a stake in the success of the individuals that we serve, no one has more of a stake in their success than they do.

And it's my commitment and my honor, really, to continue to work with you, on their behalf. So thank you very much for your time.

[APPLAUSE]

>> Great can we give the assistant secretary another round of applause?

[APPLAUSE]

>> I know for me, it's great to know that we have someone leading this office, who has a position, for the people that we serve, and I really encouraged by your comments and I'm not getting it twisted but compliance but meaningful ‑‑ meaningful outcomes so I really appreciate those comments assistant secretary is open for a few questions.

So we want to give folks ‑‑ if you have any questions, want to give an opportunity to do that now. I don't know if we have somebody who might be able to run a mic....

>> As you're getting to the mic I want to cue or great team over here RSA staff. Carol?

[LAUGHTER] just remember it's only been three months.

>> Right, right, right!

[LAUGHTER]

>> Don't be afraid. You can ask me. Kentucky or Louisville. I'll answer! By the way, you know, Steve's ‑‑ really lived in Louisville because he pronounced it correctly.

Louisville.

>> That's right, that's right.

>> Anyone, I'm happy to ‑‑ over here. Left ‑‑ your right.

FROM THE FLOOR:

Q. Thank you. Hi. Michelle from Nevada. And we were just wondering if there's going to be any work toward more alignment of IDEA with WIOA?

A. Yeah ‑‑ I appreciate the question, by the way, and appreciate, I know the work that you guys are doing in Nevada. I think you've been working, you know, sort of a lot more closely probably with SEA and have enjoyed some great successes there as I know other states are doing. And I think that's an example of something that you've been doing and you know is important. That we're realizing oh, yeah, that really is important. So, again, we're taking our cues from you. I would say, too, that OSERS I hope you know this but if you don't I hope you learn a little bit about it. In OSERS we have those two major components we have rehabilitative services administration, and we have the office of special education programs; and over the years, I think they've continued to get better at collaborating meaningfully across the components within OSERS and we have plans to continue to do that. And to model the kind of collaboration that we believe is necessary.

At a state level, but we'll continue to learn from you some great examples about that, but just know ‑‑ there will never be a time that I would not ‑‑ that I ‑‑ let me see if I can figure out how to say this. I'm sorry for the folks who are transcribing this.

They'll never be a time that won't think effective communication and collaboration is a good thing. So where we can find integration and where we can leverage opportunities, remove things that are duplicative, increase ‑‑ and give you an opportunity to maximize across programs we're going to try to figure out how to do that. Because, again, I ‑‑ I come from that background. I come from sitting in a room ‑‑ let me ‑‑ way back ‑‑ I come from in a classroom. One of the first things I did Michelle and one of the first things I had happen in an IEP team meeting we had a student who was transitioning out of high school. And in a very well meaning way somebody brought in a three‑ring binder, of phone numbers and contacts of people they may want to get in touch with if they continued to need services after they graduate from high school.

Now, what I thought in that moment was that's better than nothing.

[LAUGHTER]

A. It is. It's better than nothing. But it wasn't the best.

So I ‑‑ I had a commitment, then, to try to figure out how to ‑‑ how to work with those who had a stake. I carried that to the state. I carry that in the office that I get to lead now. And just know it will always be something that is incredibly important to me ask I ask I don't think many of us can be successful by just continuing to get better in isolation. We've got to figure out how to get better together. Anyone else? Quiet group on a Monday.

[LAUGHTER]

>> They're scared of you.

>> Collett: Okay.

[APPLAUSE]

>> Thank you again.

[APPLAUSE]

>> All right. So I heard a few things and then we're going to get ready to wrap up this session and move into the next session, but I heard a few things, and I ‑‑ I hope some of the folks from our team also heard. I heard flexibility.

Adaptability.

Approachability.

One who communicates collaborates and cooperates.

Those are the things that I had and I think those are great, again, principles for having an assistant secretary's office we really appreciate you sharing with us today, at this time we're going to close out this session.

And prepare for our second session, and so we're going to have a ‑‑ Alan, are you in the room? All right. So we're going to stand in recess for just a moment while the next team assembles. Again, thank you assistant secretary for being with us today!

(Break taken from 9:04 a.m.)

>> If everybody could start making your way to your seats we'll get started in the next minute or so.

(9:24:08 a.m.)(At9:25:42 a.m.).

>> All right. If everybody could take your seats and make ‑‑ make your way back in the room. If you're out. Enjoying your networking. We'll have more great opportunities for networking, later today; and especially tonight at the reception; so I hope everybody's looking forward to those opportunities.

It really is my ‑‑ my privilege to be able to make the next introductions, and as we move into this second general session, called "moving forward, a veteran's story" and I'm really honored to be able to introduce to you, Mr. Will Reynolds.

He was born William B Reynolds III. And childhood was predicated on civic service, and community involvement.

This mindset was instilled in him at a young age by his parents, who upon, immigrating, conducted consistent outreach to their native countries, Guyana, as well as contributing to their church community and building the Caribbean community in Rochester, New York.

Will also became very involved in both his church and the community. Will joined the boy scouts and attained the rank of eagle. After high school Will applied to the service academies which were the perfect blend of service, academics, and athletics to suit his needs. Will ended up attending Westpoint.

Upon commissioning as a second lieutenant from Westpoint will entered the United States, army infantry where he, then, attended infantry officer basic course and ranger school before accepting his first duty assignment as a platoon leader in the eighth United States Army in the republic. Of Korea. Later during deployment and operation, Iraqi served as reconnaissance and sniper employment.

Six months into that deployment will was near fatally wounded by an improvised explosive device during combat operations Baghdad. He went through 26 surgeries to restore function to his left leg and arm. His arm eventually recovered but eventually lost his leg observe the knee to a limb salvage failure. He served in a staff role in the Pentagon deputy operations officer to the joint i.e. D defeat organization. The organization stood up to mitigate the very threat that nearly took his life months before.

After serving in this role for a year, Will was eventually medically retired from the military after nearly seven years of service in military he honed in on his management experience and affinity to healthcare and graduated with an MBA from Simon in health science management.

Will went on to internships in the medical device industry, with Boston scientific, and with a small boutique consulting firm and eventually chose consulting for his full‑time pursuit. Will is now a manager with Deloitte consulting, L.L.P. Will is a published coauthor of making it millennial a study of demographic trend shifts and how this impacts government today as well as a finalist for the White House fellows program.

Additionally, as athletics has always been a main stay in will's life he continues to be an avid cyclist and runner competing in such events as the warrior games Invictus games and is a U.S. paralympic hopeful. He resides in Bethesda Maryland with his wife Cassandra, and five children. I'm going to read their names first we only had four children I was talking to him minutes ones been added since his bio. Five children, Gabrielle, Malachi, Genevieve, Evangeline, Ezekiel. In his spare time, will enjoys traveling and activities such as skiing, with his family. He also serves on the boards of disabled sports USA, U.S. military endurance sports, and the positive positivity project. So please join me in welcoming Mr. Will Reynolds.

CAPTAIN REYNOLDS: Good morning. And welcome everyone to D.C. It's really an honor to be here, and I ‑‑ I cherish that great introduction. Thank you so much. Thank you Kathy for inviting me to speak. Thank you, jack, and his team, for making the recommendation to Kathy so I could be here today to share a little bit about my vocational transition.

So vocation, and rehabilitation, those are two words that have meant a lot to me throughout my entire life. As they do for all of you, within CSAVR.

Another word for vocation is, obviously, calling. And as you can see by my bio it's what was instilled in me throughout my childhood.

I had a calling to service like so many do, and like many of you did, as civil and municipality servants.

Rehabilitation known for its analytic principles, often go into helping those make it ‑‑ make them successful.

Those and around the military, know that it's also a ‑‑ a ‑‑ constant game of calculation.

And whether you are rehabilitating, or were going through training in a real life environment or training environment or coming out of it rehabilitation is something that permeates your day‑to‑day life.

Contrary to common and popular beliefs, rehabilitation does not need to have negative connotations.

As we approach almost a lifetime away from the world wars, the U.S. government and communities and organizations have continued to place an emphasis on the various successes that we can have in the vocational transition, that service members ‑‑ as service members move into their veteran lives. Still the most notable program that helped those negotiate this transition was the service men's readjustment act signed by FDR which is now better known as the GI pill. Post World War II the GI bill led to 50% of all college applicants utilizing these benefits once they were employed they were employed usually at a 25% higher annual salary on average than their civilian counterparts. Fast forward that lifetime of service member transitions to the current conflicts, of operation Iraqi freedom enduring freedom and operation new dawn and the ongoing global war on terror efforts, and the vocational transition stresses, and pressures are slightly different. The need to achieve a baseline education is not as pervasive as it was in ‑‑ as it was before, because now the climate is an all volunteer military force where many offend those transitioning have achieved degrees and skills to differentiate themselves and foster promotions, even before they transition from service. However, those academic pursuits and skills were not always acquired with the pretense of utilizing them in a vocational transition.

To a civilian public or private sector.

Which was borne by many new initiatives in the public, and private partnership realm to help service members and veterans transition vocationally.

There are too many current initiatives for me to name, but despite those initiatives and the efforts over the past years including the White House's joining forces initiative many service members and veterans still find it challenging, to successfully transition into professional civilian careers, although many companies are challenged to meet their veteran hiring goals. Companies struggle to identify the value of military experience as it relates to their own business priorities, and transitioning service members and veterans lack the ability to be able to community communicate their experience in a way employers will find compelling this was much easier a lifetime ago after the world wars when a number of transitioning service members eight times of what we have today, were received with ticker‑tape ‑‑ ticker‑tape parades and receptions that gave new veterans the confidence to vocationally transition.

So I won't go into the ‑‑ the naming the exhaustive set of vocational transition benefits and resources, that are available to help veterans today. But I will tell you definitely takes a coordinated approach and many different initiatives to make sure that veterans are successful, in my opinion.

And explaining some of the helpful resources I'll talk to you some of the high level success themes that were.... helpful to myself, and how they played a strong role in my vocational transition.

The first of those being including a strength‑based approach in my transition.

We have strengths but for many individuals it goes against our comfortable methods to be able to operate to speaking to those strengths and promoting those strengths when we transition. Perhaps the best way to help individuals work towards realizing and speaking to their strengths, is to use a facilitated guided approach, which I know many of the organizations and offices associated with CSAVR, do that very same technique. However, in augmenting approach that the vocational rehab counselors should consider, is also utilizing peer feedback to assist participants in understanding the difference between the skills and the strengths and importance of those strengths when identifying your career.

By utilizing those methods we're able to delve a little bit deeper into the endeavors that energize participants at work, versus merely just focusing on the skills that they excel at.

It helps participants narrow down the search in the field, and focus on the careers where they find the most fulfillment.

The second facet of my transition that greatly helped facilitate it were making my brand and development more robust and doing so in an experiential way.

Transitioning from the military to civilian life is an exercise in reinventing one's self.

Given the seemingly stark contrast that not only are the potential missions of the military versus a civilian career, especially in the private versus the public sector, but also the reasons that many enter into those careers.

Many individuals who join the military, seemingly do so for... motivation of a higher sense of ‑‑ of service or purpose, to the career that they're going into.

It's for those reasons that transitioning service members, need to look into identifying one's strengths and building on them from there.

Our strengths are the foundation for building a unique, authentic, and strong brand statement that sets us apart. Identifying one's strengths and brands allows us to explore the job market and target our search to a ‑‑ a better career, rather than just a job.

The job market is full of opportunities, not only for transitioning service members, but also for those with a disability or impairment and may lend itself to needing vocational rehabilitation.

The key to finding the right opportunities...

Lies in understanding what an individual's fit is.

As far as the experiential piece, you can't put a price on the ability to have a rotational or an internship framework that's not only used in different educational pursuits, but also used by many employers.

I was fortunate enough to actually use both those methods as I transitioned out of the military.

But my transition into the civilian corporate sector, was not ‑‑ not all seamless.

There are often factors outside of your control that can lead to one's experience to change within their current employment. It could mean a change in job function, a change in the scope of work. Or a change in the services that you're delivering within that job.

Sometimes such a change could lead to one's desire to leave a particular job.

When this happens, this is where it becomes important for employers to support that individual, with the ability to rotate to a different position.

With that same employer versus looking for an entirely new employer. The military has a lot of great programs that facilitate the wounded ill and injured service members in being able to seek those alternative careers within the military and within the government, such as operation war fighter, education and employment initiative.

Of course, not every employer is going to have both the scale and the budget and the aptitude to develop an operation war fighter or employment education initiative. However, CSAVR was able to look at ‑‑ and rank and target those employers, who do have the scale and desire to develop such a program it would be extremely beneficial to the vocational rehabilitation population.

One thing that I have spoken to Mr. Kammerer's program about at vocational rehabilitation and employment is that I benefited immensely by being able to leverage the peer interaction as I transitioned.

As you can imagine due to the team nature and high degree of accountability to one another, peer input and suggestion are held paramount amongst military service members. Therefore facilitating the success ‑‑ the successfully transitioned veterans with current relevant experience for networking and mentorship, as well as the personal interaction with subject matter expertise, makes a ‑‑ a vocational transition assistant more authentic ‑‑ authentic and genuine as you interact with your peers.

This is accomplished by bringing service members together in cohorts, as a ‑‑ as it can be seen in the transition assistance program, or in the recovery care program that the Department of Defense interacts with.

Therefore, CSAVR does not have it already, I would suggest the creation of like cohorts of individuals, necessitating vocational rehabilitation, as well as a group of mentors and ambassadors, who have done so successfully to aid in the provision of advice, and input for those currently undergoing vocational rehabilitation.

Another facet of vocational rehabilitation and transition, that I know not only CSAVR but also vocational rehabilitation and employment know and do well, is aiding those in going through vocational transition, the ability to develop industry insight.

As we previously ‑‑ as I previously mentioned, it's crucial for those transitioning jobs, that they ‑‑ whether they be service members or veterans, that they not only first identify what they want to do, based on their strengths and interests, but that they do that necessary industry insight exploration.

This will help them determine where they will be a good fit.

This reduces the propensity of those going through vocational rehab, to be chasing jobs, and paychecks, and delay the start of their career.

Where they'll be more likely to maintain their employment, because they find personal fulfillment in that ‑‑ in that pursuit.

It's helpful to complete assessments like the transitional transferable skills inventory, but you want to make sure that you're not only encouraging participants to align closely with those transferable skills but you're allowing them into that industry insight. When looking for the best fit you don't want to ‑‑ you don't want those under vocational rehabilitation to be defaulted to targeting industries, or preferences, that mirror the roles that they have previously served in.

While they may have experience in doing so, if no one pushes back on their initial selections to ask them, what they really want to do, or if they really enjoyed that previous career, then they're more likely to pursue that same industry, making their selection a possible poor fit, and leading them to job dissatisfaction, and attrition.

Aligning personal strengths and values to narrow the search, for a career opportunity, allows those going through vocational rehabilitation, to purposefully channel their energy and productively search for the right opportunities.

Perhaps one of the things that vocational rehabilitation programs execute the best, and it's extremely important ‑‑ is providing an understanding of the market.

There are many tools and portals and ways of doing this, but one is providing high‑level descriptions of industries, reviewing career opportunities, and traditional roles associated with different career paths.

This assists those going through vocational rehabilitation and aligning the aspects of different industries with their personal strengths increasing the likelihood of a success by arming them with the knowledge to effectively perceive and compete for specific opportunities.

Most likely, the least utilized skill for those going through vocational transition, particularly service members transitioning out of the military, is a need and the ability to leverage their networks.

CSAVR entities should encourage participants to think strategically about the people in all areas of their network, whether it's their family, social, or educational pursuit networks.

And provide methods for building a strong connection and promote networking growth, allowing them to use those relationships boldly and effectively, to aid in their career search.

A lot of those going through vocational transition, don't understand the concept of networking, to advance their career.

Or how expansive their network may be from a lot of organic places, such as their medical providers or individuals who are committed to helping those individuals, even if not specifically in the vocational realm.

Therefore, those going through vocational rehabilitation, should be educated on had the tools of networking to dispel any networking myths. This will help demonstrate to the participants how critical it is ‑‑ to the future of their career, and force them to begin writing down who is in their network, and receiving feedback from their peers, and their counselors, on who should be in their network.

As with all these suggestions, though, the call to action ‑‑ though, it is a call to action you definitely need the need, you need to follow through which is potentially the most important piece.

Therefore, after recording one's network, you want to make sure that you go through the vocational rehabilitation commitment, to make sure that you have at least three networking interactions, and due dates for those actions to put it into practice.

One of the things that CSAVR has working in its favor, is that the commensurate response has happened within the corporate and public sector, to not only help veterans go through school, find different certifications and general ‑‑ and help out with their general transition; but also, to help market themselves better within the corporate realms.

As we know from so many segments of industry, the research and development that goes into the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs, drives to many advancements around the society given the large investments in research and development.

Fortunately, it will hopefully continue to be the same with vocational rehabilitation, which is exactly why Mr. Kammerer is here from the VA, vocational rehabilitation and employment program, to no surprise Kathy has invited him to be here to facilitate that involvement.

I'm ‑‑ as I mentioned before, I'm sure we're all aware of the former administration's joining forces initiative, where my current employer Deloitte, and many other fortune 500 companies committed to increasing, on the part of Deloitte was employing veteran hiring. It addresses the opportunity in creating an employment and retention program which is called career opportunity redefinition and exploration leadership program.

Which helps transitioning military service members translate their leadership abilities into a business context.

This program helps veterans shift their mindset to focus on their individual strengths and encourages them to pursue careers which are once again that good fit, for their attributes.

The core leadership program represented the initial offering of three separate programs. Core leadership program is a two‑and‑a‑half day program focused on the prehire transition meant to help transitioning service members translate their leadership abilities into a business context.

It is an experiential and personalized learning program that's is held four times a year, at a training university down in ‑‑ in Dallas.

The second module of that is core fundamentals which is a scalable 5 hour workshop. Which is focused on the prehire transition distilled from the core leadership, with a highly flexible agenda to accommodate diverse environments.

And the last core success, 8‑hour workshop focused on the post higher transition to ensure the retention of those individuals once they inadvertent to the career of their choice. The cor leadership program wore fundamental workshop utilized an environment to achieve the following outcomes some of which I had previously mentioned No. 1 knowing yourself, by identifying your ‑‑ unique strengths and experiences to build on your personnel brand; two, knowing your fit to target different career opportunities based on your personal brand; and the last one, knowing who can help by demystifying that network experience and exploring the power of your networks.

This is also accompanied by the ability to be able to tell your story in a way that resonates with others, and future potential employers.

Which is, obviously, the mainstay of vocational rehabilitation.

Through this program, over a thousand transitioning veterans are alumni of the core leadership program, and 98% of the core leadership alumni, have actively been able to find employment, and 98% of those alumni also agree that they can articulate their skills and experience and interests, to an employer.

This is, obviously, something that all of you in the room, as vocational rehab specialists can attribute to the ‑‑ the ‑‑ the service that you deliver to the participants that you work with.

The core leadership program is a valuable investment in Deloitte's purpose in making an impact that matters for our people, for our clients and for our communities. We try to live out our purpose every day with the jobs at Deloitte, and core is an example of a Deloitte program that directly makes an impact on all those areas.

With the core leadership program we've ‑‑ we have 300 personnel that have dedicated over 8,000 volunteer hours to the program to date.

More than 600 Deloitte professionals have signed up to volunteer for the program, and 50 of our partners and principals and managing directors are among that number. 20 of Deloitte's clients have participated in the corporate panel, to include Mr. Kammerer, and providing transition advice to the participants from their ‑‑ from their perspectives as senior executives, and building their brand in the veteran community.

So to give an example of a public sector effort, that is also happening in the vocational transition space... there's another program that's called "Warriors to workforce," which is a ten‑month program that offers operation enduring freedom Iraqi freedom and new dawn veterans with a service connected disability ‑‑ and an honorable discharge or ‑‑ and a high school diploma or equivalent, with little to know post secondary education, the ability to participate in an internship program up in Frederick, Maryland, just 30 miles north of here.

The purpose of this program is to help them find a final placement at a federal contracting organization, within the U.S. With an opportunity to transition into a new career in the Federal Government, by applying their military skills and experience in the contract specialist field.

The program focuses on transitional support, mentoring, professional development, and a foundation in career training activities.

Entrance to complete the program as a cohort, fortified by a built‑in support system that mirrors the environment and camaraderie that they experienced once in the military. That same common theme of peer to peer interaction that I mentioned before.

These relationships create a foundation ‑‑ foundation for a lasting professional network, throughout their career.

After successful completion of that program, interns advance to a two‑year acquisition internship program, which equips them with the skills and experiences, that they need to be successful contract specialists. Veterans are taught in‑demand skills and competencies which allow them to continue serving their country as civil servants because that sense of purpose in your future career is so important, to make sure that you have the right retention and service in that employment.

Interns in that program are hired as GS5 federal employees and the curriculum includes 4 major components.

Business education.

Professional development.

Peak performance.

Training and.

Mission service. The business education component provides a necessary college credits to meet the positive education requirements to enter into the contract specialist realm.

Interns who successfully complete this program are, then, converted to GS7 contract specialists and matriculate to the career where they can learn the essential technical and professional competencies, for contracting professionals.

In that same experiential learning environment, with real‑world work scenarios they're able to successfully complete that internship and hopefully move into a career that will last with them for a long time.

So I leave you with those two examples of public and private programs, that are aiming to facilitate vocational rehabilitation in different spaces.

There's, obviously, many more, and it's such an honor to learn about CSAVR, and see that it's driving the conversation through forums like this to continue to promote the knowledge‑sharing, in the vocational rehabilitation space.

Together, we can provide the best vocational transition support that's needed to make sure all that ‑‑ all those that need vocational rehabilitation, can move into the right employment sets, and hopefully, have great retention in their future careers.

So with that, I'll end and I'll take any questions and I'll pass things over to our moderator. Thank you!

[APPLAUSE]

>>> Thank you, Will.

And we'll go ahead with our next speaker and then we'll open it up for questions at that time.

And so we appreciate your comments, Will, and we appreciate your Service. Thank you. We're also pleased to be ‑‑ joined today by Mr. Jack Kammerer who will ‑‑ reference director of vocational rehabilitation and employment with the ‑‑ with the veterans administration. We really appreciate jack joining us today. We appreciate the collaboration that ‑‑ that VR has with CSAVR and we look forward to continuing that discussion and you be a part of it jack, so turn it over to jack.

>> Jack: Thank you, sir.

Thanks for having me. Can everybody hear me okay? Can you raise your hands is everybody good. You never know with the had microphones if people can hear you and I see you have the translations, too, so thanks for having me today. Kathy orchestrated this for ‑‑ for me. Thanks for Kathy west‑Evans leadership, of course, and CSAVR.

It's tough to follow Will Reynolds I will just say that and Will and I have crossed paths a number of times and I will come back to Will in a couple of minutes. One of the challenges I always have is making sure that I connect with the audience and communicate well.

I'll start out with a ‑‑ a short jack Kammerer story so a couple of years ago, I went to represent the Secretary and the department to Korea. And I was on a panel like this in fact, it was rather similar sitting on a stage just like this, but the great counselors and the great Americans in this room, there's ‑‑ about 300 in this room. So imagine maybe 200 to 250 but similar‑type room so I was here, I was there to talk about, like, I am here today, about veteran employment and transition. Some of the similar things, to what Will was describing but, again, I couldn't certainly top Will's presentation as always.

So at any rate I'm on a panel with some international colleagues some professors, from South Korea.

And as you know in Korea, it's the ministry of veteran and patriot's affairs so they have some different responsibilities within their VA as well.

So at any rate, I was talking about the importance of.... military service and as Will mentioned the value proposition of military service and I was telling them, the group, the story of when I was with the Army I worked with the secretary of the army and I was a congressional person, and we were doing a ‑‑ a retirement ceremony for Senator John warner, when he retired from the Senate and everyone knows Senator warner from Virginia great American great leader. And many of you know Senator warner was a veteran.

Veteran of World War II. Veteran of Korea. So he served in two conflicts. He was in the Marines. In Korea as an officer, and he was enlisted in the Navy in World War II as you know. So at any rate I was talking about Senator warner, his retirement. And he gave a little presentation, when we did a ceremony, at fort Myer Virginia and you can imagine standing out there on the parade ground and it was Senator warner and representative Duncan Hunter pretty much retired the ceremony. Secretary of defense ‑‑ beautiful day. Senator warner was talking in his remarks and he was talking about being in the military.

And the point of his remarks was talking about the value proposition of military service and he basically said he joined the Army in world war 22 correction the Navy in World War II. He was not even, 18. He grew up in the best schools in Virginia and they took him off to Great Lakes naval training center outside Chicago which is still there, of course.

And so they got there for the induction, and they're all in a big room like this sitting at a bunch of wooden desks this is the Senator relaying this story for me I'm just paraphrasing. And so the Senator said they ‑‑ they sat down that their wooden desk filled out the paperwork. And an officer was in front of room presiding over the event so long story short as they were getting ready to fill out their paperwork, the Warren officer said any of you that can't read and write please raise your hands?

So Senator warner said about a third of the hands in the room shot up.

And he said, well, you know, I came from ‑‑ a privileged education in Virginia and went to the best schools and at that point in my life I didn't think I knew anybody that couldn't read or write and he said the next thing that happened was the officer said, okay, those of you, that can't read or write keep your hands up.

The rest of you go help them.

So Senator warner said, that was the most impactful thing about his military service, from ‑‑ from the beginning.

And he said, it's not about me. It's about we. And working as a team; and it's that teamwork and serving on a team.

And so he said I wouldn't have gone on to be a United States Senator if it wasn't for those lessons that I learned in the military.

And, you know, of course, he had a distinguished career in the navy. In World War II and he was an officer in the Marines in Korea and he want on to the chairman of the interim service committee. I told that story for the value proposition of military leadership and I'm a telling it to an audience today and many of the audience in Korea didn't speak English this was through an interpreter and I was also talking about my program the vocational employment ‑‑ I was talking about transitioning service members into millions and a thousand counselors et cetera etc. I got done with my story and my remarks for the panel.

And there was an academic that summarized each of the presentations and I was just one of the presenters.

So the ‑‑ the gentleman ‑‑ the academic that summarized my profession said Mr. Kammerer spoke about vocational employment and the million counselors that he had helping illiterate service members going back to school.

[LAUGHTER]

>> Kammerer: So I always tell that story when I'm talking to an audience where I wonder if I'm reaching or being able to communicate. And I realized at that point I wasn't quite communicating my message because we have a thousand counselors in the area that help ‑‑ about 132,000 veterans regain employment but I wasn't talking about, you know, in World War II perhaps service members that were illiterate but today as you know that wouldn't be the case. So my message definitely got muddled and I was not an effective communicator and I look up to will Reynolds in so many ways but as you know Will is a very, very effective communicator.

Will had a very powerful message. I heard Will speak a number of times. He and I have a few things in common. We both went to Westpoint both infantry officers we both went to ranger school.

But our similarities stop at a certain point. And, you know, you heard about Will being wounded in combat I was in combat but I wasn't wounded like will and you heard about some of the things Will went through. And Will is one of my role mods and he's one of the people I look up into in terms of this field and I think he's a ‑‑ a great person to talk to about vocational rehabilitation.

And we brought Will out, back last summer to speak to our counselors, and, in fact, not just our counselors but our leadership, our ‑‑ our training conference for officers.

And it was in St. Paul and will came out and spoke and he did exactly like he did today. He got up at the podium and he spoke.

And he cave gave a great presentation, and all the officers were very taken by what Will had to say.

You know, ‑‑ and at the end of that he took few Qs and As and we were getting ready to leave, and we realized, Will realized, I realized I think Will realized before I realized because I wouldn't know any better, but his counselor from our program was an officer that was in the room that heard his presentation and neither of them knew that until he spotted her at the end of the presentation.

And I won't give her full name but her name is Heather and she's one of our great officers out in New York. And so they caught up and they both gave each other a hug and it was rather tearful.

But it really was impactful on me and it was certainly impactful on Will but it's certainly a joint program between our clients, our participants our veterans and the counselor, and I think Will had a very positive experience with his counselor, and so did Heather.

So the next day, Will ‑‑ there's a ‑‑ Will has spoken to the VA leadership, the VA senior leaders, as you ‑‑ as Will mentioned I've been on a panel with Will and I've heard Will a number of times so the first time I saw Will speak was at a panel or correction, at a ‑‑ a presentation to the VA senior leadership a couple of years ago.

And he showed a video or they showed a video about Will's experience in his rehabilitation and how he got to the point where he is today.

So long story short, I always tell long stories but they always ‑‑ I always try to have a point to my stories so bear with me when I tell you a story I always get back to the point you think if jack's up there rambling he will come back to his point.

[LAUGHTER]

>> So the next day, I showed the video, about Will Reynolds, and I ‑‑ Will is very impactful on me. Always has been from the day I met him, but a I ‑‑ I was tearful when I stood up there and I showed the video and then I introduced his counselor and I told the people in the room that Heather was his counselor and all of us were very emotional about that. Myself included.

So, the interesting thing, though, they were mad at me because I didn't show the video when Will spoke. Well, Will was the speaker, like, today and Will speaks the way what will wants to speak he didn't ask to show the video he may have had slides today but he just wanted to talk. So I thought the interesting thing about that was Will a great example of somebody that's overcome a couple of barriers, perhaps from his military service.

And as you know, the is to help those with service connected disabilities our law says employment and handicap but I don't use that term because handicap in the rehabilitation field is ‑‑ is not a term that we use even though it's in our law. But we help those with service connected disabilities and barriers, overcome those barriers, and get reemployed.

So I thought it was appropriate that I showed the video the next day, No. 1, will didn't ask for it; No. 2 I had it and I hadn't thought about it; No. 3 I wanted to make the point that Will's counselor was there and she was impactful. You know, we all saw ‑‑ we all know ‑‑ how impactful Will is.

So the point was Will stood in front of the audience and addressed them the first day like today. There weren't any ‑‑ you know, it wasn't obvious to the group what Will had been through, but when they saw the video in the next day they had some more of the context. So I think that that was an important point that Heather had helped Will go back to school, get reemployed, and get some of the ‑‑ the ‑‑ the physical and other rehabilitation that he needed and that's what's so critical about our program.

So, you know, at the end of the day I think I would say this about Will. He's one of the nicest people that I know. One of the most committed people that I know.

I don't ‑‑ I won't tell you how old I am but I haven't reached the point in my life where I've become married yet but I look up to Will and I tenants that I become married and have a family. He's one of the best family people that I know. But most importantly and I think you heard it today, Will Reynolds is one of the most impactful people that I know, so he went through our program. We don't have a distinguished graduate element of our program, but he's certainly a distinguished former member of VRE that likes to talk about his experiences but I think Will has devoted his vocational efforts to being impactful to helping others, and to use his experiences to talk to audiences such as this.

So I would always hope to be as nice and committed as Will. I hope to have a family commitment and ‑‑ and service like Will does, and at the end of the day I think all of us should be striving to be as impactful as Will is because that's just the kind of guy he is.

So I brought a counselor with me. I told Kathy, I ‑‑ I ‑‑ I went to Westpoint I had a great career as I told you I was a congressional person for a little while, but ‑‑ and I helped wounded Warriors in a volunteer sense and will and I have experience working with wounded Warriors but at the end of the day I'm not a vocational rehabilitation counselor. Kathy ‑‑ I'm going to somebody else here in a second Kathy came up when I came up to the lobby and I was talking ‑‑ Latrice one of our great counselors those of you who have heard me speak before I always say I don't go very far without a counselor because I lead a nationwide counselor program but I'm not a vocational rehabilitation counselor. So I understand the field. But I have never delivered those services. I don't have that positive education requirement. And I have not done that for a living so Latrice is with me today. She's a great American. Come up through the ranks in our field. She had ‑‑ she went to the university of North Florida. Has the appropriate positive education requirement with a masters in vocational counseling, rehabilitation counseling she's worked in the private sector hasn't been a state counselor she has worked on ticket to work and been in the VA about five years doing it primarily ‑‑ she started her career ‑‑ and she went to the university of North Florida she started her career in Florida and moved to San Diego.

She has a focus in independent living, you know, I'm going to talk about her program just for a few minutes because she didn't really want to hear me talk about her program you really wanted to tie things together as you know we have about a thousand counselors all of them have master's degrees like Latrice. Special competency is in independent living. The V ‑‑ the E in VRE is employment we are an employment program.

And I did mention I think in my Senator warner story Will and I'm sorry if I left that part out Will mentioned the GI bill and how transformative that's been for ‑‑ for ‑‑ for society at large and for veterans in particular. But certainly Senator warner used his GI bill as well in terms of his experiences.

So as you know we just got the new act which allows you to use your GI bill pretty much forever so that will be further impactful, but our thousand counselors like Latrice, they all help veterans with service connected disabilities and barriers to go back to work.

And, you know, at the end of the day that E in employment is so important.

So one of my other messages today, is ‑‑ I think we have a lot in common with CSAVR. We are not a state rehabilitation counselors. We are VRE counselors or Latrice is and Kathy mentioned to me, Latrice were going over this on it train going over how many state counselors but I certainly was on the wrong side of this number Kathy says there's about 18,000 practicing state vocational rehabilitation counselors.

I don't want to hold her to that number but an order of magnitude so there's 18,000 of you‑all. There's a thousand Latrices in the force but, you know, at the end of the day one of the things we have in common as well as delivering rehabilitation, assistance, is the employment aspect of it.

And one of the things, Dr. Maureen, who is in the audience Kathy is in the audience. Both of those great Americans, not only represent your organization, or have represented your organization, but also represented the advisory committee for rehabilitation, which is the federal advisory committee and rehabilitation and VA; so Kathy is currently our chair. Maureen served previously.

But one of the things they both helped me understand is the.... the common interests we have that Will talked about is employment and helping veterans get back to work. Now, we do have an education component. The E is for employment, not education.

So 132,000 or so veterans were in our program last year.

At any given time 55 to 60% of those Veterans are in school.

Training and education is an important part of what we provide right Latrice you're trained in that and you would help me if I were in the program right? That's you would do. As will spoke about one of the things we want to make sure we do is encourage people to get better information and make better choices.

So one of the most important things Kathy was ‑‑ you know, how Kathy's she's a great American in every sense and a great leader. But at the end of the day she was encouraging when we were talking upstairs waiting to meet Will about a program that she's been working on for employment.

And one of my other messages is, you know, we want to help veterans make the right choices in their education, she was talking about a culinary program.

About 80% of our veterans that are in school of the 55 to 65% about 80% would like a four‑year degree and right Latrice that's kind of what they gravitate towards which is fine but there are vocational and technical programs that are very important, too, and I think Will would agree with me he's nodding his head I'm not trying to get Will to agree with me ‑‑ but, you know, at the end of the day vocational technical and important too but Kathy was reminding me we always have to be aggressive about employment opportunities. I see Carol in the audience. We work with RSA. One of the common interests we have with Carol and RSA is employment.

So I think if ‑‑ if the two things we have in common as you‑all represent vocational rehabilitation, and counselors, and so do we, but we also have a joint goal for employment. And as Will said, I think we both want to present better information and help people make better choices.

So I did want to just kind of talk a couple of more minutes and I promise I'll sit down ‑‑ about people, process, and technology, and I think I talked a bit about people. I would told you we have great people like Latrice who make a difference every day I stepped over ‑‑ I channel surf a lot. She has a particular competency in independent living. Some of our ‑‑ our law says if a vocational goal is not currently feasible we can help you with activities of daily living.

Patrice [sic] also possesses some clinical background and experience most of our counselors are not clinical as you all know. We are not a clinical program. But we do help a small number of veterans about probably 1 ‑‑ 1 to one and a half % of our workload is activities of daily living and independent living so Latrice has a particular experience and competency but she also has a background in mental health and clinical counseling and she is certified in that. She doesn't deliver that in her current capacity but she has in her previous capacities. So many of our veterans have physical disabilities, many of our veterans as Will can also relate in his experiences, I'm sure ‑‑ have mental health challenges that they need assistance with. I would ‑‑ I would tell you that we work very hard to partner with VHA, veterans health administration, Dr. Dorothy Williams who will be here later today another one of our great Americans in the field that Kathy works with and that's Latrice's boss we work closely with the mental health team at VHA because mental health is very important in our program.

We have done joint training in mental health between us and VHA. They have learned about VRE. We have learned about mental health aspects. Also deployed some mental health training to our counselors so that's a very important part of what we do. So I talked to you about the veterans a little bit 132,000 clients in our program.

Last year, I think this year, will probably be ‑‑ for that every veteran in our program has a service connected disability to some level. Usually 10 or 20%.

We've done a longitudinal study of our program in the last couple of years and we've found that on average our veterans we studied for the years 2000 and Will spoke about cohorts I'm fully on board will, with your idea of cohorts we should track veterans on cohorts on average our veterans are in our program between 5 and six years as I mentioned most of them want a four‑year degree to better themselves.

And then, if you look at the employment aspect for about a year to a year and a half I think it's right five and a half years right Latrice, six years is about the average long time. 90% of our veterans report they're mildly to moderately satisfied with our ‑‑ I'm going to get the hook pretty soon so I promise I'll sit down one of the things we've worked with moreover the years is a relatively high case load. Right now it's gone down a little bit Latrice I think it's 133 to 1 today. If you're state rehabilitation counselor you're going to say jack that's nothing sometimes we operate in the hundreds and we do understand that. On the clinical side if you were in a mental health program or compensated work therapy for instance our counterpart program in VHA they might have a case load of 25 to 30 but that's the clinical program. So one of the things we always want to make sure is we're trying to balance the caseload for counselors but for our program we've been linked to the compensation disability compensation, and as you know we had a backlog in VA, V B.A. for several years which they work so hard to get that down. So I always cross my arms and say as the backlog goes down the VRE work has gone up and that has been true.

So in 2013, we were up 10%. 2014: 9 and a half %. 2015, 6.7%. 2016, 4%.

And last year, for the first time we went down by about 4%. So this year, I expect to be on average ‑‑ to be at least 132,000, but we were very sensitive to that counselor caseload.

So that brings me into the last point I really wanted to make.

Technology. I know you‑all have worked on different things with technology. One of the things we've heard about in the state ‑‑ and ‑‑ we heard about this from RSA thank you, carol, for your partnership. We've been working hard with carol's folks ‑‑ but the ‑‑ automated rehab assistance I think it's called Sarah. Some of the states have that helps the counselors, we have made... we have made a foray into counseling. Telecounseling. We started that in 2015.

We're very proud of that as we were the first telebenefit of V B.A. telecounseling has not solved all of our counselors challenges; is that correct Latrice? I'm not sure if she agreed or disagreed with me I was looking for a positive nod. But it hasn't solved all of our problems. I don't think she was dig agreeing with me. At the end of the day it's helped us. We're doing a pilot now started it in Florida expanded it to five other locations to find if we can find veterans entitled to our program with telecounseling and Kathy, looking at you but for the whole group one of the things we've found is ‑‑ and we have to be very carol about this.

I know ‑‑ Latrice I forgot to ask you do you have your CRC credentials? So many of you in the room have your CRC credentials. I know that you under the legal and ethical aspects of counseling more than I ever will. And I don't pretend to have that basis of knowledge. That's why Latrice is with me to keep me straight and I know all of you will keep me straight but I know there's ethical and other boundaries in how you deliver counseling one of the things we're careful in telecounseling is make sure we don't cross the boundaries and disadvantage the veteran or do something we shouldn't be doing so technology has helped us. We found in our pilot where we started in Florida that we could save two to four hours driving time two hours each way, four hours total for the veteran to come in for their appointment using telecounseling and we also found that the counselors seem to like the experience, which seems a little bit counterintuitive because I always think counseling is a face to face business right?

It's not a business. It's a profession. You‑all are professionals, but I'm always very careful to say counseling is a profession. You‑all are profession and I'm sure you husband the prerogatives of your profession very carefully to include the legal and ethical aspects right? Which we talked about.

But the counselors report they liked the experience, talking to somebody at home, on telecounseling, because they can get ‑‑ they can kind of slow down and take the time to get to know that person.

But one of the things that I've learned from our counselors is be careful that when you're not in the room your ability to judge someone's mobility, their gait, how they can move around, might be challenged. So we're careful about that. And then being able to judge my affect and how I'm doing, otherwise, is important. So we're seeing some good things in telecounseling. Sir, can I borrow your phone just a second. I promise I won't call anybody or use it!

[LAUGHTER]

>> We're getting ready to get the 10,000 users in VHA ‑‑ new technology the president, announced in the fall it's called PEXEP and right now we years a system called jabber for telecounseling, and jabber requires you to have a laptop, or a ‑‑ a ‑‑ a desktop. When we get PEXEP ‑‑ by May, I think we'll have it out to everybody. You can counsel a veteran on their phone on their iPhone or iPad.

Thank you, and the interesting thing about that I've seen the demonstration of it, it depends on how much bandwidth you have at your house and how many other devices you have operating, Will, but if any of you have used ‑‑ I'm sure most of you have used VTCs. We use in the VA we use Microsoft Link. That's one way we communicate and you can see people, when you go to jabber, if any of you have seen jabber it's almost like the person is in the room with you but it's not ‑‑ right? I got ‑‑ the right head nod that time from Latrice, yes, it's a good experience if you go to Pexep it's just an incredibly good experience. And so, again, I know you all are face to face.

Can you do face to face on your iPhone?

Yes, you can. Are there challenges? Yes, there are, but that experience seems to be a positive experience. Cuts down on the driving time and I think we can better serve people. We get into the whole conversation I know as state counselors, too, I know ‑‑ some degree of business is done over the phone, how we get into going from being face to face to doing business over the phone. We do have a lot of admin stuff in our program. So one of the other things we've been doing with technology and try to reduce admin and I know I need to sit down and let the rest of the discussion and ask will and other questions but we have a lot of missed appointments. I'm sure all of you go to the doctor and dentist you get your little reminders I get mine from my dentist dear Mr. Kammerer don't forget to come by and get your teeth cleaned at 1200 hours today and will and I learned at west' Point to be on time the five responses is yes, sir no, sir, no excuse sir, sir, may I ask a question sir may I make a statement and, actually, I should say sir or ma'am. I graduated in ‑‑ what year did you graduate will? What year.

>> 02.

>> So I ‑‑ I can't tell you what year I graduated but we were ‑‑ we were fully integrate would women by the time I graduated so the responses were sir or ma'am, but will and I tried to get to the right place on time. We learned that at West Point if we didn't get there on time we were told about it. So we have a lot of missed appointments on VRE. We don't like that ‑‑ we figured out how to send text reminders from people like you get from your dentist and that's not going to solve all of our problems either but it will help.

And finally on the technology front we just got a thousand dragon licenses I don't know if anybody uses Dragon, but it's good software to do your case notes.

Hopefully, Latrice have you seen the demo? You know what I'm talking about. Dragon. So Latrice is all over it we haven't deployed but we're getting ready to deploy our licenses so technology hasn't solved all of our problems the counselor still needs to come first. We are a face to face program and we deliver services to veterans every day.

But it's hard work, and if we can reduce the admin, if we can use technology to our advantage, but my final point is ‑‑ and will Reynolds is a great example of this and Kathy and Maureen and Carol, and everybody else that I don't know in the room it's also about leadership right? Which is ‑‑ as we move forward together working together, we need strong leaders. We need to train our leaders we need to grow our leaders and we need Will Reynolds and we need Latrices and future Kathy west‑Evans and Dr. Maureen McGuire, and Carol, would be another example.

We need leaders like yourselves, but we can't assume that we ‑‑ they just appear. Right? We have to help you. We have to develop you, and we have to give you the training and the skills. So I promise I'll sit down but the last thing is it's also about partnership right? We have to work together.

So, Maureen was wanting to partner before once she was here.

And she's still here, Kathy has been a great partner for several years, and I mentioned my partnership with RSA so we can't solve our problems alone. We have to work together. We have overlapping missions. We don't have quite the same mission, but they're close right? We have the E in employment in common.

All of you don't serve veterans. You have many other clients but, you know, at the end of the day I think we have mutual interests. We have mutual concerns and we want to work together jointly. So having us here today is so important.

I could never ‑‑ it's tough to follow Will Reynolds, but. He's a great example of somebody that's come through our program. And turned his experiences into the most impactful positive thing you can imagine as you heard today. So thank you, will, again always an honor. Latrice there's 999 other Latrices that are not good as her but great Americans. We have a highly trained highly successful highly motivated force like Latrice so thank you very much for listening to me.

[APPLAUSE]

>> Thanks Jack and thanks for your comments. Thanks Will. We appreciate what you're doing now in your careers but we appreciate your service to our country and what an honor to have two Westpoint graduates to be here. Great pleasure. Little time for some questions for ‑‑ for Will, Jack, and Latrice, I think she will probably answer some questions too. Does anybody have anything they want to ask our panel?

Right over here. Rita is going to get a mic in that direction, I think. And I don't know if the lavs, are on.

FROM THE FLOOR:

Q. Can you talk a little bit more about PEXEP and I just tried to find it and I can't locate it so I'm just wondering if that's a proprietary VA, VR&E and how are you're rolling it out and if it's available off the shelf to other programs?

A. Thanks hopefully I spelled it right I think it's PEXEP.

I think that's a ‑‑ a ‑‑ both a technology and ‑‑ it could be a vendor. I'm not 1,000 percent sure but we acquired that at all like we acquired jabber from VHA veteran health administration and I will certainly get back to Kathy and get you more details about the system that we're getting to use. I'm sure it probably goes by other names as well but PEXEP, I ‑‑ it could be PEXIP and I could have gotten that screwed up but I believe it's PEXEP but we'll give Kathy more information in the follow up and Latrice will take that up as a do‑out. But from what I understand the differences between Jabber and PEXEP family is that it's ‑‑ it allows you to get the telecounseling on more devices.

And these ‑‑ these ‑‑ it still is scheduled through a central server, but the administrative connection part of it is easier; so it's more user‑friendly; and it's more technology uh... not prevalent. What's the word I'm looking for? Able to be used on more devices.

So we'll get you more information. Thank you for your question, ma'am.

FROM THE FLOOR:

Q. This question is for Will. I was interested in the ‑‑ the ‑‑ I guess it's a class you mentioned. Two days. In Texas to help, wounded Warriors sort of transition to ‑‑ from military leadership styles to corporate. Could you tell us a little more about that?

A. Yeah, that program has been running for about four years now. We do it in cohorts of 50 transitioning service members.

And it's highly focused on that peer to peer interaction so we bring down table coaches who have been through that same kind of transition and work on a one‑to 5 race; so take them through each module of the course as they go through the whole three‑day period and there's plenary sessions mixed in throughout that three‑day period and the goal is at the end of that program the individual is able to work a career fair, have better focus on what industry they want to go into and then be able to negotiate all the other services like networking, and... you know, just peer to peer interaction that will help them land where they eventually want to go for an employment pursuit.

>> Anybody else? More questions? Anybody? Back of the room.

FROM THE FLOOR:

Q. Not a question but I did find PEXIP. It's an app for ‑‑

A. Sorry I got that wrong. That's an I not an E I'm usually okay in my vowels on my spelling, but sometimes, you know ‑‑

[LAUGHTER]

A. You just kind of get your wires crossed so I apologize for getting my wires crossed. Thank you.

>> I have one question for Mr. Reynolds.

FROM THE FLOOR:

Q. My name is James, from Michigan rehabilitation services.

Mr. Reynolds, can you say a little bit more about the role, and maybe give me an example, that the vocational transition assistant played and plays in the role of rehabilitation?

A. Are you speaking to my ‑‑ my counselor that I had within VR & E.

Q. Yes.

A. Yes, so from the start with VR & E I went through that industry exploration session and that really helped focus what kind of training I needed to go into to meet my eventual career goal so that industry fit was ‑‑ was really impactful because it helped me determine what kind of educational pursuit I wanted to go into.

So I was able to focus on the health science management field and that steered me into the grad degree pursuit that I eventually went into. Then, throughout every stage of my schooling, not only are they looking at your ‑‑ your grades to make sure that you're keeping your grades up and they can actually pay for your school and flunking out they are making sure you are still down the right career management path as they're checking with you on kind of a bisemester or bimarking period frequency; and they just make sure that you are continually tracking towards that eventual goal.

Obviously, there's instances where people need to ‑‑ you know, refocus their effort and might do an internship that lets them know that, you know, they eventually don't want to get to that goal but you have that counselor with you every step of the way that helps you change your trajectory if you need to.

>> Thank you. Other questions? Oh, okay.

>> I'm not seeing any.

All right.

>> I don't know Latrice is disappointed she disrespect get a question, but one thing I forgot to point out, too, is we hold our counselors responsible for employment outcomes and last year, we achieved about 15,000‑plus outcomes, 10,460 of those were employment.

So one of the things that folks like Latrice, are responsible and accountable for in the field is getting veterans reemployed; so I think that is something that I failed to point out. We do pretty well at. But since it's ‑‑ as Will mentioned it's a five‑to 6‑year cohort model, where you ‑‑ you don't become eligible or you don't come out on the backside to get reemployed until five or six years.

It makes it a little bit of a challenge, but to ‑‑ to Will's point. There's a lot ‑‑ we expect a lot from our counselors to include those employment outcomes, and I failed to mention that. I'm sorry.

>> Thank you.

>> Any other questions?

I know we appreciate the collaboration with ‑‑ with the VA, and ‑‑ and VR & E, and the ‑‑ the public VR programs in the states. Along those same lines there is a standing committee with CSAVR. Be meeting ‑‑ little bit of a shameless plug for my committee at 3:00 today but the veterans committee, and historically had a few empty seats so we would love to have anybody that would be interested to join the ‑‑ join us just in the committee. We won't necessarily put you to work.

It's a ‑‑ an open sort of discussion time; but with the goal of being... looking for ways to better collaborate between our state partners, federal partners, as we want to make sure there are no gaps in serving our ‑‑ our veterans; and that we do it very well; so also... um... magazine at the ‑‑ at the table out there.

The U.S. veterans magazine be sure and stop and pick one of those up. Great articles, great stories in there. I encourage everyone to pick one up out at the table.

Anything else, Kathy?

All right. Well, thank you for your attention, thank you to our guests and our speakers; and the ‑‑ looks like we have a little reception going on next and we'll join back here at 10:50.

[APPLAUSE]

(Break taken from 10:36 a.m.).

>> All right.

(Pause. )

>> Can we start coming back in the room, please?

Okay. Rita ‑‑ Rita's on it; so you better get back in the room!

(Pause. )

>> Folks to come back in, the session is ready to start!

>> They can't hear you.

>> It's not working.

>> Testing? Can folks ‑‑?

>> Just well!

>> Can you help me get folks back in. Can we reconvene? The session is starting!

(Various conversations.)

>> Hello? [Tapping on microphone. ]

>> Helloooooo.

(Pause.

>> Can you please come in and sit down so we can stay on schedule, please?

(Pause. )

>> Okay. I think we've got everyone.

>> Joe: All right. Let me see if I can get this... so, you know, it's really tough to break up a good conversation ‑‑ everybody's having today so if you could make it back in. You know, going to try to stay on track because we have our regional meetings following this and, again, congratulations to the new directors. Hopefully, you had a chance to meet everybody. 300 people that were in the room.

So, first of all, let me acknowledge, sue Howell, and ray, who are the chairs of the employment committee. Sue was not able to be with us today and I'm assuming ray is sitting out here today and I also want to acknowledge, the ongoing work of the national employment team, that they're doing with businesses across the state, and your support of the national employment team, particularly, the liaisons, to within each of our states.

As we know, business is one of our customers. And business provides the work experience, for our youth, they provide the jobs for the people that we get ready to meet their talent needs, which makes our services, complete.

The better that we understand our business workforce demands, the better we are prepared to meet their needs by training and providing the services to the individuals that we serve.

So to ‑‑ today, to introduce our esteemed panel I'm going to turn this over to Kathy West‑Evans who leads our teams.

>> Kathy: Thank you, Joe and thank you for your leadership.

I think all of us working on the business side are very excited to have Joe's leadership and support out of California and I had a chance to spend time with him and his team as well as some of our business customers so thank you. Joe referenced our national employment team points of contact. So if you are on that team, can you raise your hand, stand up, indicate where you're at?

Okay. It's so good to see you and, thank you, for the work that you are doing. We talk about a lot of the work we're doing nationally, but these are the people who are boots‑on the ground in the states and at the local level. So thank you for your work.

Including you, Michelle.

[LAUGHTER]

>> She raised her hand.

>> Kathy: We often talk about our work with business, and I've heard many of you say well, we're only talking about large corporations.

Hopefully, what you've seen over the last several conferences, is that as we're talking with large companies, they have smaller companies in their supply chain, that also have an interest in working with our talent pool and getting great talent. But I think what's exciting about today's panel is that we have an actual demonstration of working with a large company. Prudential, where we're building a great model and I'll introduce or team here and working with a smaller company, Kwik Trip down here, where we've got a partnership in three states.

So wherever we're at the strength of what we're doing is that we're working across states. And we're working in response to businesses.

We're developing those business‑driven models, whether the company is large or small. It starts with really understanding that is more than just posting a job.

We want to understand the company, the work environment, the job requirement; the process. And really understand that full opportunity.

And on the other side of the house, the more we understand about that, the better we can prepare individual candidates to employ their talent and I think Will said it earlier: It's not just a job. It's a career. And you're going to hear that today. We're also doing a lot of work in retention and keeping people working. In fact, prudential has a internal team of VR counselors we're currently partnering with and even talking about having them bring their candidates to the talent acquisition portal. So as you can see there's a lot of different facets to company partnerships.

In investing you will see some great articles. Prudential's not there yet, fay, but we'll get there you'll see the outcome of our partnerships with 500 partners over the last couple of years as well as the apprentice business based learning models our partnership with our comprehensive training centers thank you that is VR at its best. That is the national team that's really coming together. So with that, I am going to introduce everyone on the panel. And we've got a strategy.

So I'm going to do introductions and then they are going to present. So first, I want to start with fay Dunbar. We have not met in person I had a feeling she was sitting up here and we were sitting each other we didn't know who we were because you look differently than you do on e‑mail.

[LAUGHTER]

>> So fay Dunbar is the director of diversity recruiting in the talent organization at Prudential.

And this role really focuses on developing that strategic diversity recruitment. Prior to that she was the talent acquisition manager. Prior to that she was the placement director for Kelly Services.

You've had a ‑‑ a varied career. She's very active in the community. She's worked a lot on initiatives. And you're going to hear from Fay how we're working with them, right now, in eight states, to develop a pilot that we're going to be moving across the country.

Fay was also the 2014 Prudential Advisors national recruiting award recipient, finishing as the No. 1 talent acquisition manager in the country. So we're in good hands. Okay.

>> For now.

>> For now!

[LAUGHTER]

>> She also has a sense of humor so she'll get along with us great. Come to the reception ‑‑ okay. We'll have a lot of fun.

Our other business partner joining Fay, is Joalyn, and she is down here. She is the return to work coordinator for Kwik Trip Worked with that company for over 20 years and started in the worker's comp and moved to return to work and she also in that role, works with individuals, who have a nonoccupational or non‑work‑related disability so her role is huge.

She also coordinates accommodations, and she ‑‑ we all know in companies we have internal champions, like Fay.

And Joalyn. She's the driving force behind the retail helper program.

Beyond that she also serves on the advisory board of a local independent living center. IL resources. So our company partners are also working on our state rehab councils. Working with our independent living centers. This is where I think we turn the corner on starting with that vision of a career in the very beginning.

Now, all partnerships work because we have great VR teams on the ground.

So it's my pleasure to introduce Michelle Krefft. Michelle is a member of the national employment team. She's our point of contact in Iowa.

She's been in that role for three years.

And she was a voc rehab counselor for 15 years before that so she's got experience on many levels. And you'll do great Michele. I know you're a little nervous. You're fine. You're with friends. Okay? Okay. Joining Michelle, we have Delora regional director in Wisconsin. She's one of the leaders in terms of our work with business.

She's been in her role since October of 2015. She held leadership positions before that with the chamber of commerce.

Which helps me understand why she has the commitment to business and good to have you there.

She's worked with the former governor. The lieutenant governor.

And it's really honed her experience around many things including managing a VR team that understands the importance of business.

And to her left, your right is Roberta Johnson. Roberta is an employment special with the voc rehab agency in Minnesota. She has been there for over 40 years. So this is one of those lifers in the VR world.

She has really given.... a lot of energy to both customers. Individuals and business.

She ‑‑ when she originally was given the job offer, she said that, one of the reasons that he had picked her was that she would be the first hire on his team from Iowa!

So ‑‑ okay. So this is where VR agencies are so close, we hire each other's staff.

[LAUGHTER]

>> So throughout the year, she's been a VR technician, a job coach and employment specialist, she's also just completed seven year term on the Governor's Commission, where she was appointed to serve in that role. So as you can see, our panel today, is very steeped in our business.

And at the end of the day, it's all about the relationships and it's all about the partnerships. And that's what I'm excited for you to hear today.

So we're going to start with you, Fay, the comedy leads, right here, the stand‑up comedian's going first.

>> Fay: So for the AV team is it okay to use this?

Hello. Can you guys hear me?

>> You're on!

>> So Michelle to my left and I, don't prefer to stand we hope it's okay if we prefer to sit as we share our stories. Can you guys hear me okay? Good morning, and Kathy thank you for that warm welcome!

As she mentioned I am the director of our diversity talent acquisition team at Prudential and first just want to thank everyone for this opportunity. It's my first time attending a CSAVR conference and I was met with such warmth and welcome and it's just ‑‑ it's just exciting to see the energy and the passion the commitment that's really palpable in this room. So I'm just really excited to be here to tell our story to hear a little bit more about our partnerships and hopefully that you kind of can take something back with you as you leave the conference.

I ‑‑ I ‑‑ I have been with Prudential for about nine years in this role for two years leading this effort and have an athletic background played tennis played a lot of sports I bring that lens with me to my job and the work we do ‑‑ we all do is really a contact sport. We have to be really diligent around what we're doing, and it's kind of like hand to hand combat if you are a veteran, too, so it's really much in the trenches as we think about strategic work we also need to think about how that cascades down into how it affects what you do and your desk and your deem's desk so I'm happy to speak with you about that. I'm going to talk about Prudential and about our challenges and how they were met with our VR team and what we've come up with. Prudential is a global organization. We have offices in Europe, Asia, Latin America and, of course, United States.

We are a large organization as Kathy mentioned so about 50,000 employees worldwide. Excuse me and we're headquartered in Newark New Jersey. We are committed to helping individuals and institutions, grow and protect our wealth. So a lot of insurance financial services, funky stuff that I don't even know what I do. I'm an HR professional so ‑‑ but we do a lot of work that is financial‑based and is complex in a lot of ways. So when we think about the work of how we hire diverse individuals into our organization and specifically people with disabilities, we needed to be a little bit more around ‑‑ or think about how do we have that hand to hand combat.

A lot of the lens that we apply to what we do for other diverse ‑‑ and other demographics, did not easily apply to what we do here at Prudential when it comes to hiring people with disabilities.

We had a relationship with our CSAVR partners for a number of years. But we were missing it and things were just not connecting as they needed to be and for a couple of reasons one is because our industry, we're financial services, but we're not retail. We're not manufacturing. We're not sort of the roles that typically you might see, you know, within your teams. We work differently and complex in those ways. We have different interesting roles requisitions across Prudential so we have customer service roles. Product managers. Marketing, IT. The span across many different areas that really require certain set of skill sets.

That causes a little bit of challenges around how we hire individuals into our offices and lastly, assessments. We have requirements and not for ‑‑ lack of accommodation we're very proud about how we accommodate but more the robustness around how we accommodate and how we assessed talent rather.

So those were some of our challenges. Really made it difficult to hire people in general but specifically around people with disabilities.

And so when we thought a little bit about what we do to solve this challenge, we came up with the 8 state pilot which I'm going to go into right now and we own a job training program which Michelle is going to cover in a little bit so the eight‑state pilot is, you know, we need to come up with a different name for that eight‑state pilot ‑‑ we need to come up with something creative. We've done a couple of things to narrow down the right jobs, the right location so we get the right outcomes.

And so out of our 13 offices a lot of them were really prime for us to recruit people with disabilities.

They had the roles that were more high‑volume that were more acceptable for those who come on board transferable skills. Those that really lended itself to those hiring managers or hiring teams would be a little bit more open‑minded.

The locations also made sense. This is where those roles were housed. A lot of those roles were in these eight locations, and it didn't make sense to focus on all jobs across all 13 locations at Prudential but to really be strategic and intentional around the role and location so that we can get to the right result.

We came up with those eight states those eight states are Arizona, Florida, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Minnesota, Texas, and New Jersey.

Was that eight? I think it was eight. Okay. And so we connected our internal Prudential recruiters that support those locations. And those roles in those locations, with our local VR counselor and those locations as well.

And it seems pretty obvious but we did not do that before and it was a big miss because as I mentioned before, the challenges that we were facing, were not like any other challenges that we at Prudential or the VR office had faced before. And we needed to connect and have that conversation.

Our recruitment team who are on the ground interfacing with candidates understanding our managing or hiring manager's needs were not connecting in the right ways with our local VR counselors.

And so we encouraged the conversation on a monthly basis and introduced this eight‑state pilot simply just to talk.

And that's sometimes what, again, we think we take for granted that we're talking in the right ways and we weren't doing that.

Over the past year, we've had monthly connection points with our prudential hiring teams, and our local VR counselors and it's resulted in a tremendous increase of candidate flow, and just the relationship.

We've invited our VR counselors to really come into our offices, learn a little bit more about how we do business; so that they're able to be more of an advocate for us as they speak to consumers and to talent.

We are.... really pleased with the results and how things are going thus far. In addition to those high touch points on a monthly basis we also have bimonthly touch points where we get all of the teams together from all of our eight‑state pilot recruiters and our VR counselors to talk about best practices, shared challenges, successes. And really, again, begin to think more intentionally around roles, location, and how we can really have the conversation to connect the two because there was just a disconnect before.

This has been going on for about a year or so. And infancy stages so unlike some programs that are more developed we are excited about the results because, again, before we weren't connecting and we weren't having that conversation that really is increases awareness and increases our ability to partner a little bit more effectively together.

Just in conclusion, because I'll wrap up because I know we have a great panel that you'll hear shortly, I just wanted to echo some of the comments that we heard earlier from our ‑‑ our other panelists and assistant secretary Collett from Kentucky mentioned, you know, there's no better person to connect ‑‑ you know, consumers with jobs and those individuals that are right. They're helping them. People that are right there connecting to people and better understand what their needs are.

And those are our VR, career counselors they're able to understand the skill sets, the needs to vet talent more appropriately.

And there's no better people than our prudential recruiters who are able to understand our jobs our roles be a little bit more of an advocate and have them come together in a way that is more deep and a little bit more intentional so that we can have the right results.

So I'm excited about how far we've come. I'm excited to see what will happen as we continue to roll this ‑‑ this roll these conversations out and continue these conversations and just excited about what, you know, what's to come could not be more proud of our team and the VR offices which we're working with. So thank you! And I'll turn it over to Michelle who will talk a little bit more about her programs.

>> Thank you Fay. So I was really excited and I knew I liked you when you said you were athletic because I'm completely opposite. Had I stood up and tried to walk to the podium I have tripped and fallen and you could have all had a nice laugh!

[LAUGHTER]

>> So we are really excited about our ‑‑ our relationship with Prudential, and want to acknowledge Kathy. Kathy was, actually, the one who brought this relationship with Prudential to Iowa and made the introductions, helped facilitate a kickoff in Dubuque, which is the city in Iowa that Prudential is located.

And so at the kickoff, many staff came from all around the country to the site, and our VR staff came and we collaborated and we had conversations, about what does our partnership look like? What kinds of things can we do?

Our voc rehab staff were able to do a presentation on the benefits of partnering with the voc rehab agency. Examples of accommodation ideas; and we really.... I felt like made the connection at that meeting.

But that was just the beginning.

Like Fay said it took almost a year before we got our first placement.

So what happened after that meeting, was that our counselor, Jason, uh, who is in Dubuque, actually kind of almost did an externship, at Prudential.

He spent an enormous amount of time, with the recruiter, Kelly, getting to know the company.

He took the assessment and he said it was pretty difficult. And he's a smart guy!

[LAUGHTER]

>> And he followed and shadowed the different jobs.

And when I talked to Kelly, Kelly said, "Jason knows what we're looking for. He knows that candidate that is going to excel." So we know when he makes a referral, it's legit.

And so, they ‑‑ they partnered for close to a year. And during this time, Jason felt that an on‑the‑job training would be valuable.

And on‑the‑job training in Iowa, is where our job candidate would do an internship‑like opportunity at a business; and our voc rehab pays our job candidate a stipend, during that time of training.

So they can really kind of determine if this is a good fit for them. It gives our business partners an opportunity to determine ‑‑ is this person learning? Do they like it? Are they fitting in? Are they going to be a good match?

Also, during that time, our counselors are really involved. And they're spending a lot of time there, making sure that the ‑‑ our job candidates for the right supports and the accommodations and are really transitioning into that ‑‑ that employment position.

So this was a challenge!

Because, as you know, state agencies, like ‑‑ have a lot of legal things we need to overcome. And our terminology was completely different than Prudential's terminology.

So our attorneys worked together, and ‑‑ and came up with a contract that worked for both of us.

We have not anybody actually start on‑the‑job training because our job candidates got hired and didn't need the on‑the‑job training but I did want to talk a little bit about the on‑the‑job training.

One of the things that's really important was that Jason needed to understand the hiring process at Prudential. So he knows that everybody needs to pass a federal and state criminal background check.

He knows that he has to do a record of their work history.

And verify employment. And he also knows that they need to be able to pass the assessment. So prior to starting any on‑the‑job training, or referring anybody to Prudential, Jason goes through all of those things with our job candidates to make sure they're going to be the right fit.

Then, he has an idea of the culture and what they're looking for. So he sits down to make sure that they're going to fit in and be a great candidate.

So we ‑‑ put together an on‑the‑job training guide, and when I interviewed Kelly, she said that she felt some of the benefits were ‑‑ that Prudential is looking for talent to be successful in the ‑‑ in this program, gives Prudential an opportunity to evaluate talent before transitioning to hire.

She likes that the job‑seeker has an opportunity to determine if this is a good fit for them. The candidates have been out of the workforce sometimes for a period of time, and this helps them transition at less risk to both Prudential, and to the job‑seeker. It gives Prudential an access to a larger pool of talented workers.

Helping Prudential to tap into more applicants while receiving support from the counselor.

It diversifies their pool of applicants. It gives the job candidates an option to train for a fortune 50 company that they might not have otherwise have an opportunity to access. They like the applicants who came through the door were prepared and prescreened by voc rehab and the trainees who would successfully complete the program, have the competencies necessary for employment. The defendants, obviously, to the job seeker are that they have the ability to try the job without risk.

They know that this is a training program, and it takes some of the anxiety away from starting a new job, even if it doesn't work out, they've gained some transferable skills to help them move forward with employment. And they understand the work environment the training and what the jobs like. They know if it's a good fit for them.

There's a lot of benefits to the voc rehab agency, of course, too.

One thing they wanted to make sure that we consider, is that, again, voc rehab really understand what Prudential is looking for.

And so in the last 30 days is really when we geared up on referring job candidates for employment and we've referred four who have been hired.

Which is really exciting!

And I wanted to tell you just a little bit about these four job candidates.

One of our job candidates was a woman, who suffered a traumatic brain injury from an accident, that she was in, and she had been unemployed for a long period of time.

However, she had the right skills and aptitude and everything that Jason felt would be a good fit for Prudential, and ‑‑ when they interviewed her they decided not to do the on‑the‑job training; that she was the perfect person, and they hired her.

We also had a young college student who had some pretty significant mental health diagnosis, and, again, he was prescreened and vetted, and was actually hired as well.

We had a young woman with PTSD, depression. She was also in an accident, and had not worked since her accident. Her first job was with Prudential.

All of ‑‑ all of the individuals that have been hired this month are in the customer call center. They have different positions within the center, but they're all in the call center.

Lastly, we have a university of Iowa graduate, with spina bifida, and he did not have very much work history.

Though, he had those skills and those talents and those abilities; and so he was also hired. We're really excited ‑‑ starting this month. We're going to have our first on‑the‑job training participant be at Prudential.

So we can't say thank you enough to our amazing businesses, that are up at this table. Iowa has the privilege of working with both Prudential, and Kwik Trip. Or Kwik Star as they are in other states. So I have the honor of presenting to you my other business partner, Joalyn.

[APPLAUSE]

>> Joalyn: Well, thank you Michelle, first off for suggesting Kwik Trip for this business panel. Thank you, Kathy, for inviting me to be here today so I'm excited to share with you why our partnership with VR has been so successful. Our single point of contact partnership.

First off, brief background on Kwik Trip. We are a convenience store company. With over 21,000 employees, we have 635 stores in three states Wisconsin Minnesota and Iowa.

We have a food manufacturing facility that produces our own bakery dairy, pizzas, sandwiches and then we have a distribution division which delivers 80% of the product that we have in our stores.

We're a family‑owned company that strongly believes in taking care of our coworkers and our customers, and we're guided by our mission statement which is to treat others like you would like to be treated and to make a difference in someone's life.

And this mission statement guides all of our business practices and our dealings so back in 2013, Wisconsin came to us, to discuss ways to increase the hiring of individuals with disabilities in our stores and at that time we had about 40 in our stores.

We discussed the struggles store leaders were having with different contract service providers coming in and talking about the job, many different ones coming into the same stores over and over again.

And then they would reach out to me in HR with their great consumers and I would try to promote them. But I was 100% unsuccessful.

And our stores are very fast paced, too, we're supposed to take care of our customers and if they see the store leader constantly standing and talking to somebody off to the side that's not good for customer service.

Wisconsin offered to bring all these service providers together and basically be the gatekeeper for us with them.

That was the beginning of our formal program and our single point of contact partnership and, again, like I said we only had 40 when we started so our partnership with Wisconsin quickly spread to Minnesota and Iowa.

And we've had many ‑‑ many conversations, about job descriptions. Our mission statement. Our core values, our business model ‑‑ interview scripts, safety, application process and background checks.

And we came up with a good model for our program.

At trip we developed a special private link for the position that only VR has so if a consumer is interested in the job they do need to get the link from VR. Then when service providers reach out to me. With their consumers, I ‑‑ I also share with them, that, you know, they need to reach out to VR.

This provides a great service to our store leaders, and we're not trying to determine whether someone's a good fit for a job or not but these guys are.

And then VR does a great job screening all those candidates and sending us the best job matches that can really do the job and do the job well. And then once I get that information from VR, then I forward it on to or store leaders and then they proceed with the typical hiring process. Another one of the main points why this program with VR works so well is they're there to offer our store leaders assistance, when someone starts, whether it's job coaching, assistive technology job guides, they're there to help us. And then a big part of that, too, is they're there to help with retention we have problems come up down the road I know I can call the guys and say can you help so and so at this store he or she is struggling and might need additional assistance I'm pleased to say our turnover rate with our retailer is 9%. The turnover for part‑time is 45. That's a phenomenal difference. So they're doing a great job.

With VR, being our gatekeeper the service ‑‑ with the service providers, it allows our store leaders to focus on customer service. That's why we're here. I also found that, if an individual is not working with VR and I ‑‑ directed them to it ‑‑ they, then, applied and were able to be part of the VR program and all the additional services that they have to offer for them.

Now happy to say we have 356 helpers in our stores so over half of our 634 stores have an individual with a disability, working in our stores. And we have about 50 openings yet, in all three states so we're going to continue our partnership with VR to fill those positions.

And what, again, has driven this tremendous success is this thorough screening process that VR does with the consumers to bring us great job matches. As I mentioned before, store leaders were not interested in the recommendations but when they went to the meetings and they hear how they hired this great person that does so much in their stores they're, like, I want one too.

And here's some of the examples the store leaders would say. We have to order more product in our store because the shelves are fully ‑‑ to keep the shells fully stocked because we're selling more because of the great job the retail helper is doing. And the overall atmosphere in the store is improved because of the positive attitude the retail helper brings everybody, is happier in the store.

And then I like this, too, our coworkers get so much more work done with the retailer helper there because of the duties there, allowing our coworkers a lot more time to take care of the guests and this list could go on forever.

And I'm happy to say this program has developed to the next level, and we've had a number of our store leaders promote, their retail helpers to the next level job position because they're able to do all the job functions.

And that, I believe, really is the ultimate success of our retail helper program. And the key point I like to share is VR does a great job bringing us great job matches.

Our states focus on what Kwik Trip needs therefore helping us be successful and this in turn helps them be successful with all the consumers that we hire.

I want to thank VR for our partnership. We certainly couldn't do this without them. And their focus on our business needs. Thank you and Delora is coming up next!

[APPLAUSE]

>> Now I'm going to talk about Wisconsin's story, and the great partnership that we have with Kwik Trip.

So as Joalyn said our relationship started in 2013 it was before I was with VR, but I imagine it took a few months to have conversations and work things out. So in July of 2013, we began referring consumers for Kwik Trip hires so in that six months that we had left that first year, there were 18 hires made which is, you know, good. We didn't know what to expect.

But then we really ramped it up and in 2014 we filled 61 positions. So it ‑‑ it ‑‑ you know, the success was proven earlier as Joalyn said I think it's because we made sure the people who were going to get those jobs were well qualified and would work well in that vice president because you want to make sure the store is happy or any business you place people in they're happy and that could sour the relationship for future placements. So that was really good.

So from July 13, when we started, to the end of March of this year, we have referred and they've hired ‑‑ maybe referred more ‑‑ but they've had 205 hires, that came from our recommendations.

93% of those 205 are either still employed today, or successfully completed their first 90 days. So we're really proud of that statistic, too.

Joalyn talked a little bit about a single point of contact. So in Wisconsin, we have nine business service consultants. And Amy, does a yeoman's job. She is based in the western part of the state, where the headquarters are for Kwik Trip; so she can be there face to face if there ever needs to be a face to face meeting. So Amy gets all the referrals. No matter where they are in the state. Even for areas of state she doesn't personally serve us, that's how the business partner wanted it.

That's how we have been able to establish a really good working relationship to be able to give them the services that they want. So Amy as our business service consultant, she'll get all those leads, and then she knows who the business service consultant is in the other parts of the state, that have those openings; she can, then, fill in them in. Joalyn has one point of contact and we do the rest of the work. We're currently working with Kwik Trip to identify places for about 30 to 40 candidates so the ‑‑ the opportunities here expand and go on. In Wisconsin retail ‑‑ retail helpers, earn between 9 and $11 an hour.

And they can work up to 15 hours a week.

So 9 to $11 an hour is a really nice wage, especially for part‑time. It's well over minimum wage, and it's great that they see the value in our consumers, that they will pay at that rate.

The retail helpers do a wide range of duties. They help stock the shelves. They clean, they fill the window cleaners at the gas pumps; and numerous other jobs. And as Joalyn said, then that frees up the other staff in the stores, to wait on customers, and to do some of those other things. So it's a clear value add‑on all the way around. In the spring of 2015 we had some staff personally deliver some nice wooden plaques, to the first 50 Kwik Trip stores that came on board in the relationship.

And I'm proud to say those plaques are still hanging up today so if you're ever in Wisconsin, and you stop at a Kwik Trip look behind the counter to see that's one of those wooden plaques that means that was one of the first 50 stores that came on board. And I like the idea that those plaques are there because it's a visual to every customer who walks in the door and can see that plaque and know about Kwik Trip's commitment to helping hire people with disabilities.

I also know that many people in Wisconsin will tell me that they stop and shop at Kwik Trip specifically, because of this program.

I mean, they're great stores anyway they're clean my husband loves their food he says he stops there all the time during his workday. But I think it's the extra value add‑on that they hire people with disabilities and that just makes them such a great community partner. So we are delighted in Wisconsin, to have such a strong business partner in Kwik Trip.

And I'm excited that I was here today to be able to share Wisconsin's success story with you. Thanks.

[APPLAUSE]

>> I just want to say thank you, Kathy for inviting me to be on this panel, and I really enjoyed being with all of you.

As I say over 40 years is long time, but I've done a lot of different things through this.

When Joalyn first called me over four years ago, and said I would really like to start working with you, in Minnesota, with a retail helper, we were deleted. We had some single point of contact relationships already going in our state. And Marcie, shares in the single point of contact for Kwik Trip in Minnesota for us.

We really, again, wanted to really dive in and learn the job descriptions, what skills and abilities they were looking for; and then we came back to Joalyn and said we would really like to do face to face screenings with people.

We were working a lot ‑‑ we, at that time ‑‑ and still now, we have internal vocational rehab placement staff, plus we really need our community rehab programs. We can't do it each alone. We need to collaborate and work together.

So one of the things that Marcie and I did was we went out and met with all of our teams. And our VRS managers as the openings occurred in the stores, and then we also went with the support of our managers from VRS in the areas to meet with the managers of the community rehab programs and their placement staff. The main goal was to explain the request from the business, for the single point of contact, and it ‑‑ this is how we wanted it to work for the business. Really looking at the business needs looking for people with the skills and abilities for the job.

Also they promote from within so it was an entry‑level position. I think I've primarily worked in rural Minnesota most of my years, providing VRS services and so for me, it was really nice to hear Kwik Trip saying one of the reasons they set this up 15 hours a week, no weekends, no evenings, most of us that have worked with businesses in retail know that a lot of the part‑time positions are weekend hours, and nighttime.

Some of our folks need to use public transportation to get to and from work. So this was a perfect match for some of our rural areas because people could work during the day living in some of the smaller communities. And it was a starting point for some people, as mentioned. We've had a number of promotions from within. When people have demonstrated skills and abilities for the next position.

We learned a lot of things, as we always do when we're doing screening. One of the first things I realized is going into Kwik Trip store which I was already familiar with as a customer ‑‑ some of our folks had not done grocery shopping before thus to set up the display for the bananas, avocados, tomatoes, potatoes and onions, they didn't have a clue what something might be spoiled and needed to be removed from the shelf. So I worked with our independent living center locally and we did some pictures of bananas that were ready for sale and bananas that were overripe.

And we worked a lot to kind of build this into our screening to make sure we weren't assuming that somebody knew the difference in the product quality.

We worked a lot in terms of preparing people for interview process. We've learned a lot about that whole process with Joalyn, sharing with us their expectations; and ‑‑ the bottom line was looking for somebody that would be comfortable working in that type of culture and environment.

We ‑‑ once they come through Joalyn, we e‑mail them out to our VRS counselors and CRP staff providing placement and they send candidates names they would like us to consider. Marcie and I go in and look at the assessment of eligibility, on each person, that comes through that process; and we'll review progress notes the VRS counselor has entered. At times we will consult with a counselor we want to make sure that the similar goal is on the employment plan as well. Before we move forward and set up the screening.

I've had some counselors participate in and sit in on the screen. I think it's very valuable for them had they not worked the job placement and developing business relationships to just see some of the things the employers are looking for and skills and abilities as far as that labor market in the upfront planning.

Once the person passes through the screening, I also ask that the CRP staff whoever is providing the placement services be a part of that meeting. And then we send the ‑‑ the name directly to Joalyn as she mentioned and very timely, Joalyn gets it out to the store leaders as soon as possible.

We wait a couple of weeks. If the candidates haven't heard, we have permission from Joalyn to follow up with the store leader and just kind of check on status and, you know, it's a way for us to find out maybe the person isn't following through on something. We find out the references aren't getting back to Checkster, who does their reference checks via e‑mail process and so we find out things or in some situations not very often but maybe somebody had a misunderstanding as to when they were supposed to go for the interview.

The communication and the business development that we've had is just wonderful. It's open communication, and looking back over the years, my experience working in job placement, it doesn't feel like we're working in the government and Joalyn's working in a business. We're working together. We're partnering together. To help more people with disabilities become employed.

In Minnesota one of the things that we started doing over the last year is Marcie and I ‑‑ when we don't have a VRS candidate after a particular time period ‑‑ we will ask Joalyn if we can have permission to open it up to other people with disabilities, our CRPs and our school staff would transition ‑‑ have people that aren't necessarily a VRS consumer or they might be on a waiting list, and they are referred maybe to the CRP from the County. Marcie and I are assisting with screening and individual, but with data privacy once a screening is finished, then the CRP staff or the school staff do an e‑mail to Joalyn connecting those pieces together. We're also now doing screening for more people with disabilities not just VRS consumers. I want to share just three quick examples of people that are working in retail helper positions.

I have one individual who I had worked actually when he was finishing up high school. And really went through an evaluation with a CRP, and really, interested in foods and gardening, but I just couldn't quite find exactly what he wanted to start. Didn't have a lot of work experience in high school.

A couple of years later when the retail helper position came open, he was one of the people that was referred to be screened by our CRP. It was interesting because when I talked with him more, most of us, he has autism. And so most of us would look at Joe and think, he's never going to be able to sell himself in the interview or work with all the guests that come to Kwik Trip store.

I can say four years later he has just done amazing and really ‑‑ he says he found his dream job.

How am I doing for time, Kathy? I'm okay.

>> Couple ‑‑

>> I'll try to hurry.

And so, he just really has just blossomed and ‑‑ and loves every day going to work.

Another individual we had experience... Kwik Trip store hired him and he was not receiving services from VRS, at the time; and the mother came to our agency, saying, "I really need some help to help my son maintain his job."

So through a process of meeting with her and finding out kind of what was going on and getting permission to talk to Kwik Trip, and in the process he was made eligible for our services ‑‑ Joalyn and I set up that I would go and meet with the store leader and to say, you know, we're here to help. You know, maybe there's some accommodations or ‑‑ you know, we're here to help you assess kind of what's going on, what's going well; and things that need to be improving.

When I got into the situation, I learned that, you know, the store leader was really trying ‑‑ really trying but we learned that this young man could not real well enough to perform stocking and find items on the shelves.

And that's something that's really hard to accommodate for someone. You really have to have pretty much a fourth grade reading level these days to do stocking accurately.

And then he also had difficulty with expiration dates and being able to put things in order on the shelves.

But the bottom line we really learned, was safety was definitely a factor for him working out in the lot. He had difficulty judging the cars and the ‑‑ and he would get very anxious.

And then we also learned that he could not tie the tops of the garbage bags and that was something you need to be working out in the lot as well as in the store. So we suggested getting some yellow twist ties and his mom and I worked on trying to see if he could do that on the top of the bags. Well, he did accomplish that but the cleaning, and the stocking, it just wasn't a good match. But we continued to provide some job coaching, and it was really ‑‑ it was really a great experience for me, because I ‑‑ I performed the ‑‑ provided the job coaching, and trying to help the job work for him.

And through the whole process, the store leader was just really appreciative, that we were helping being supportive when things weren't going, as well as they had hoped.

And the young man, then, went through and made the decision that it just wasn't a good job match for him.

The store leader, couple of month later posted for a new position. Wanted to fill a retail helper again. So it's just not when things are going well. It's the rapid response we give when there are issues that come up that need help, and where there is a resource.

So we have.... over 90 actual retail helpers in Minnesota now. And that does ‑‑ I mean, we've had some folks transition. Students say it's a starting point and they know maybe they don't have the skills to do that next position for promotion but it gives them the work experience, and the soft skills, you know, that they can move on to something else. Like, we had one young man that went to work in assembly after doing the ‑‑ you know, for over a year, with a retail helper.

So, it's ‑‑ we appreciate our business relationships and we look forward ‑‑ I particularly, look forward and Marcie does, too ‑‑ in expanding more in Minnesota in voc rehab. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

>> I'm back. And I have been told to be quick because I'm between you, and lunch. So I will be really quick.

Of course, Iowa is excited to have a large partnership with a large business, like Prudential.

And a large partnership with a small business like Kwik Trip.

I have four short stories for you of some of our successes with Kwik Trip.

In Iowa, we're a pretty new partner. So we thank Minnesota and Wisconsin for this ‑‑ for starting the partnerships and getting it going and making it so successful.

We've had 20 placements in the last year and a half which is about how long, we've had this partnership in, in Iowa.

So we have a young boy, young man, who had limited verbal abilities. And he didn't have a lot of confidence but he was given an opportunity with Kwik Trip, and he is thriving. He is doing excellent. He is the face of the company and I think I heard Joalyn quote, if I had ‑‑ I had to write this down ‑‑ maybe you can quote it ‑‑

>> No you go!

[LAUGHTER]

>> If everyone worked like Ramiro, I would have it made.

We have a Deaf older worker. He's dynamic and when you walk into the store his light eyes up and you feel so welcomed and you want to be in this store every day. Because he is such an amazing man.

And he ‑‑ when you walk in, he smiles at you and he points to his name badge and it says my name is Ed. And I speak American sign language.

And then he helps our ‑‑ our customers that come in to the store.

In another store, we had a woman who was not able to read.

And with the help of her VR counselor ‑‑ or maybe she did it on her own ‑‑ I don't know ‑‑ but instead of having a list of the tasks that our job candidate needed to complete, she made pictures for our job candidate to go through, to complete the tasks. And this job candidate is, again, excelling, and ‑‑ I was really excited because guess how I learned about this? Through Joalyn. Joalyn was the one sharing the success stories, and saying, look, at what's happening in this store! Look at the success of this young woman!

And the last person I want to talk about is Julie, and, yes, I do have releases for all of these people. I promise!

[LAUGHTER]

>> Julie was a 57‑year‑old woman who had only worked in a sheltered workshop. She had never worked in competitive integrated employment.

She.... interviewed for Kwik Trip, and was hired. And she is, like, rocking it! She's so amazing. She's completely out of her shell. She's an awesome worker. I called her not too long ago and she said to me, "Michelle, I'm the best worker there and I'm never going to get fired because they love me".

I'm, like, I know they love you. Julie ‑‑ USAToday she has been featured. You can read about that story in USAToday. She's an amazing young woman with amazing talents and abilities. And I don't know a lot of things but I know that together, we can do wonderful things.

Thank you, all, so much.

[APPLAUSE]

>> So we have a minute or two, any questions for our panel? Somebody's got the mic. Questions? No questions.

>> Getting there.

>> Wave your hand Robert!

>> He's running.

FROM THE FLOOR:

Q. . Thank you for warming the group up a little bit great presentation. I was really excited about assistant secretary Collett's comment about compliance and outcomes, and the commitment to the individual.

So my question is for Roberta, I believe.

When you talked about training people with disabilities that are not VR clients. Could you talk about how that relates to compliance, commitment, and all of that?

A. Well, we don't ‑‑ you know, we don't default the person's disability. And if that person who is a nonVRS and working with whoever is their placement staff, wants to ‑‑ to divulge that, then that's between those ‑‑ that partnership and so, as far as compliance, for the people that are nonVRS, and ‑‑ again, we don't ‑‑ we don't make a request that VRS candidate needs to divulge either.

It's more if you need accommodations. (Inaudible).

A. Oh, that ‑‑ again, the referral source, if it's a CRP, they often have a job coach. If the person needs job coaching.

You know, some of the people that we ‑‑ have been hired, have not needed very much coaching at all.

So, you know, ‑‑ and I ‑‑ one of the things I didn't mention. We have an individual, too, that was ‑‑ shelter employment for six years and felt he was ready for community work, and he was hired as a retail helper, like, almost three years ago now, and then he was promoted, a year later, and the store leader asked him to train the new retail helper so that was really quite a success, too.

Does that answer your question.

Q. Yes, ma'am. Thank you, thank you very much.

FROM THE FLOOR:

Q. One more question.

To ‑‑ to follow up on your question about compliance, and Roberta's work in serving people that aren't VR customers. I'm the director of Minnesota General so ultimately, I'm Roberta's boss but we have a dual customer and the customer's business as well as the VR customer so I think we have to be flexible.

We have to think about ‑‑ at the end of the day what makes the most sense. So it would be ludicrous for me to say, Roberta, you can't work with ‑‑ with ‑‑ with Kwik Trip, if individuals aren't be served by VR.

>> Very good. So just a couple of comments before we ‑‑ we wrap up today's session. We certainly heard today about the need to understand our business partners' culture. What they're looking for in their employees and too many times I think when we think of business we're always looking across the table at somebody else. But think about this folks: All of us hire. All of us have our own talent needs. Our own way of doing business. And when people that are coming to us don't meet that we don't hire.

So this is not always about looking at the other person. It's about looking at how we do business as well and better understanding our business partners. The second thing that we certainly heard quite a bit about, is the ‑‑ the need to have the appropriate screening, to ensure that job match.

Again, something that we very much do.

And certainly, we know that the workforce particularly that middle part innovation and opportunity. So think about how Kwik Trip, was innovative, creating a classification within their structure, that provided that opportunity for people who otherwise would not have that chance, and boosted their sales in the process.

For every business, boosts their sales, you get a smile. Because that's what it comes down to.

So a big round of applause for our panel, please.

[APPLAUSE]

>> So this is the time that we move into lunch. And for those that have regional meetings moving into those, followed by our committee meetings. So thank you, everyone!

(Concluded at 11:59 am)