

Virginia CPID and a Demand Side Approach: Developing Career Pathways While Meeting Business Needs

ROB FROEHLICH: We welcome viewers to the second of a four part webinar series on career pathways. This webinar is hosted by the Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities, or CPID project in Virginia, including the Department for aging and rehabilitative services, the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired, and the George Washington University Center for Rehabilitation Counseling, Research, and Education.

I'm Dr. Rob Froehlich, Project Director and Adjunct Professor at the Center for Rehabilitation Counseling, Research, and Education at GWU, and a member of the Virginia Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities team. I will be your host and one of your presenters during this webinar.

The other presenters for today's webinar will include Tish Harris, CPID, Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired. Diane McBride, Business Relations Manager, Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired. LaPearl Smith, Business Development Manager, Virginia Department for Rehabilitative Services. And Debby Hopkins, Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board, the Valley 2 Virginia Grant.

Because of this is a recorded webinar, and there will not be an opportunity to ask questions live or through a chat box, we want to encourage viewers to reach out to any of the presenters with questions or comments after viewing the webinar. Contact information is provided at the end of the webinar. We have also included PowerPoint slides and a text-only version of this webinar on our website, gwcrcre.org.

We encourage you to please complete the evaluation survey for this webinar which can be accessed by clicking the Evaluation link on the website. If you would like to obtain CRC credits, you will need to complete the evaluation after viewing the webinar. Finally, this webinar is closed captioned and a transcript will be available as well.

Let's start with a brief description of what we hope listeners will gain from this webinar. We will share some specific Virginia CPID activities to illustrate how we have successfully engaged business with our initiatives from the general to the specific, as well as outcomes resulting from those activities. Items we will address include business supports resulting from addressing business.

Let me detail some of those needs. The lack of qualified credentialed workers in the pipeline, section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act and federal contracting recruitment, diversity and

disability etiquette for the workplace, accommodations, universal design, and assessment, techniques for ensuring individuals are a good match for in-demand business positions, and collaborative and seamless business service. Additionally, we will talk about labor market information and its relationship to the CPID project. Finally, we will share some Virginia CPID innovative business service partnerships and programs.

This is an exciting time in the field of rehabilitation services. We've had major changes as a result of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act, or WIOA. We focus more and more on data-driven decision making, we have access to more sophisticated outcomes measurements, technology has made us responsive to consumers' needs in real time, and it has also allowed us to learn much about our collaborators and the world of business.

We have access to extremely sophisticated labor market information and related tools that inform the work we do. Current day, we need to be aware of such terms as "job driven," "business as customer," "workforce development system," which entities that term refers to, and how we can partner with those entities. We'll be talking about those topics and more.

In short, the supply side to demand side transition means that in vocational rehabilitation, we've moved from a position of, we have this great person, to talking with businesses using the language of, "what do you need?" And then finding appropriate congruent matches. This is reflective of a demand-driven or job-driven approach, which is congruent with contemporary rehabilitation, as per WIOA.

Professionals in our field are more focused on an individualized approach with matching business needs, job candidates' knowledge, skills, abilities, preferences, and life spaces. And all of the professional and ethical responsibilities such matches require. We use a business model, and that wording is intentional. Business, not employer. Businesses do more than just employ people. In short, we've gone from informing, to listening, to being informed.

So, Tish, you've been front and center observing some of the legislative and professional transitions in our field. Based upon your experiences with the Virginia CPID project, can you tell us a bit about what it means to move from a supply side approach to a demand side approach, and help us get some context on some operational definition.

TISH HARRIS: Thanks, Rob, I would be happy to. As you mentioned, VR as a group was often so excited about the individuals that we were working with, that we could not wait to contact a business to offer a great candidate without knowing their specific business needs. Historically, we followed the supply side practice, where we focused on who was in the pipeline, getting them training in fields of interest that they identified, and then working to get them employed. Sometimes, we found the training areas were not in demand for full time employment opportunities.

We've now found a more effective equilibrium. With the current low unemployment numbers, and the shortage of skilled individuals in the pipeline, we have an opportunity in VR to serve



business by moving the needle to the demand side focus. We've begun to develop intensive and effective business relationships by listening to business needs. We simply need to ask, "What hiring needs do you have? And what skills and credentials are you looking for?" And then take out our supply side pipeline and match to those needs.

Working cooperatively with the business services teams in our local workforce development areas has often been extremely helpful because we have an information exchange of hiring needs from multiple sources who are all working together to address business needs. Here I would note that a business should not have to-- nor will they-- take the time to learn about all of the partner agencies and groups and to know what each one does. Instead, a seamless business services team will meet business needs by working cross-agency with multiple groups to provide skilled workers who match the needs of business.

We've also created some unique partnerships, such as the Virginia Manufacturers Association partnership, that has helped us to learn about business demands in the manufacturing and logistics sectors and has given us access to forums and seminars on this industry. That has been instrumental in helping us connect, as well as understand and provide training and information to our counselors who are unfamiliar with these sectors.

Of course, the overarching piece that I've not yet mentioned is that we use labor market information to create sector strategy to identify demand driven industries and then to further drill down into career pathways with self-sustaining wages. We access labor market information first on the state level, and then with our workforce boards and their local plan, and finally with businesses in that sector to confirm the numbers that we found on LMI. Our counselors and staff love using the Career Index Plus due to its simplicity of use and great information when working with our individuals.

ROB FROEHLICH: So this is all really helpful information, Tish. Could you give us some examples that help us think through how these topics relate to how the Virginia CPID project uses labor market information to create matches between businesses and job candidates?

TISH HARRIS: I'd love to share that. Using the labor market information I mentioned previously, CPID determined two expansion areas in the industries in Virginia to add to our original initiative. The Blue Ridge area of Virginia is filled with distribution centers and manufacturing centers, and it's a day's drive from 2/3 of the US population. That makes it a hub for manufacturing and moving those goods. For this area, we found a very high demand for logistics.

The Hampton Roads area is known for the Newport News shipbuilding in dry dock, making it a mecca for welding careers. We methodically validated the demand indicated by businesses in those areas. Knowing that food is always a plus to get people to come, we partnered with community colleges to invite businesses hiring within the sector of logistics or welding to a demand-side meeting for a lunch discussion, where we introduce the credentials we are considering for training.



Here, an important note is that we invited operational staff from those businesses who were familiar with the jobs themselves and the skills needed, not human resources staff. We asked businesses to validate the credentials we were considering and to identify any additional training needs they might have. We were more than pleasantly surprised when all businesses who attended these meetings agreed that they valued the credentials, they would interview our training graduates when they were hiring, and they would pay more if graduates had earned credentials.

So Rob, I would finish by saying that our lessons learned included the best practices of having business give us real-time information on hiring needs, not just today, but projected needs over the next one to five years. When we connected with businesses and we confirmed their interest and involvement, we found that participants in the supply side meeting that followed were more motivated to send individuals to train because they knew the opportunities were real. The opportunity for employment had been validated. From that point on, the demand side meeting has become our standard. If business does not want it, does not need it, or value it, it's not a good investment for us.

ROB FROELICH: So, Tish, for those not familiar with Virginia, I think it's fair to say the regions-- for instance, the coastal tidewater region, the northern portion of the state, the mountainous southwestern region, and everywhere in between-- have very different labor markets. How does the CPID project address those differing regional needs?

TISH HARRIS: As we look at the huge demand for manufacturing and information technology workers, we've realized that we did not have a ready pipeline of trained and credentialed individuals for these high demand industry sectors. For manufacturing, we began working with the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center to support manufacturing technician training, which allows students to lead our program with stackable, industry-recognized credentials, including forklift, OSHA 10, career readiness certificates, manufacturing associates, and manufacturing technician 1.

With IT, we found that not only our consumers but also our counselors and staff found the myriad of IT pathways to be a complete mystery. We worked with partners to create some identifiable pathways for entry- and mid-level. We shared career pathway maps and had industry experts speak to staff with information on opportunities and training and what credentials were needed to enter the field.

We provided tours to overcome industry perceptions to 346 individuals so far. These were educational for our staff as well as the individuals we serve. Most of our counselors had not seen manufacturing or IT work sites in action, and the tours offered them the opportunity to better serve their case load.

We have generations where parents tell their children, "You have to go to college if you want a good job," which is not always a valid statement. It's interesting that no parent ever probably says, "I want you to go out and work in manufacturing." Most of our parents have a decades-

old perception manufacturing is hot, dirty, and low-skilled, low-pay. Likewise, TV shows and movies have portrayed IT offices as plush, windowed offices as affluent.

Tours allowed us to shatter these perceptions, and there was quite a look of surprise in the faces of people when they learned that manufacturing is now tech- and robotics-driven, and they were reminded that computers don't work in extreme heat, cold, or dirt. Likewise, the other surprise, when our IT tour showed the cubicles and the team group approach of IT and smaller spaces that are windowless to reduce glare, people were shocked. We definitely had a turnaround in thinking.

We also knew that we had to look to the future to build this pipeline, which required some creative thinking. How do we get youth, who are often told more often what they can't do than what they can, to embrace manufacturing and IT, and how do we build their confidence to enter these fields? Our answer, academies to provide hands-on career exploration.

We'll go into details on these later in the presentation, but I'm going to add here that these were not only fun, they were also successful in reaching our goals of awareness and building the pipeline. Finally, we've looked to apprenticeships. I'll let our apprenticeships experts fill you in on those details.

ROB FROEHLICH: So, we are fortunate to have Debby Hopkins of the Shenandoah Valley and Workforce Development Board and the Valley 2 Virginia Grant. Debby, there is another term-- and Trish just mentioned it-- that I've heard a good bit about as it pertains to the Virginia CPID project, and that's "apprenticeship." Could you share a bit of your knowledge on apprenticeships with us and tell us how that relates to your experiences with Virginia's CPID?

DEBBY HOPKINS: Thank you, Rob. I would be delighted. In 2015, our board received a \$4 million American Apprenticeship Initiative Grant, 1 of 46 awarded around the country. This V2V grant was part of a national effort, a high priority, to expand inclusive apprenticeships as a proven method to reduce the critical skills gap and build a pipeline of qualified workers.

With strong partner alliances including the CPID grant team, we've been successful in creating apprenticeship career pathways for underrepresented populations, including individuals with disabilities. Before we discuss one example of these great pathways, I'd like to take a moment to review the apprenticeship model. Registered Apprenticeship is a structured training program that captures the "why" and the "how" to learn to perform an occupation safely, proficiently, and exactly the way businesses would like you to perform it. This program is then certified by the relevant agency in your state to meet federal and state government standards.

Employees who participate in an apprenticeship program are registered by the government agency, and upon completion of this program-- which can range from one to even six years-- they receive a globally recognized journeyman's credential. And this is kind of the king of credentials because it certifies that you can do the job, occupation, and not just one or two skills in the job.

So an example of this is at Wilson, the manufacturing technician training program that CPID individuals, the Virginia Manufacturing Association, all came together and developed. This MTT program was developed into a formal pre-apprenticeship to prepare students for employment and apprenticeship with companies who have chosen to invest in this longer term training model. V2V then obtained approval from the state for the MTT's curriculum to satisfy all of the related instruction requirements for the industrial manufacturing technician apprenticeship. And this saves a lot of time and expense for the businesses who hire these students.

Take a look at the model and you'll see that related instruction is the "theory," OJT and mentorship is the "how" with required mentors to show you how to do the job, "dollars for skills gain" means that for every step that you gain in being proficient in that job, you get an increase in your wage. And then the last, is that it is the National Credential, and business is at the heart of it. It is their apprenticeship program.

Two examples of businesses who have chosen to use this model and are thrilled that they did, who have also taken Wilson MTT students and registered them in this program, are ComSonics and Hershey. Hershey started their industrial manufacturing technician program with a graduate from-- his name is Chris-- Chris is nearly finished with this program. There are several more in the pipeline.

ComSonics just hired and registered two students from Wilson. One is going into this entry manufacturing technician. The other is going into an electronics technician apprenticeship. So apprenticeship is proven to be an excellent method for many businesses to build a pipeline of talent and for students to gain an entry into these career pathways, not just the job.

The WWRC pre-apprenticeship model has gained national attention as really a terrific inclusive apprenticeship model for VR centers, and one that is promoted by national agencies such as the Office of Disability Employment Policy. We presented at six different workforce development conferences and numerous disability focused events.

This model is sustainable and relevant for our economic times. So I'm delighted that we were able to work within this partnership to help create the wonderful pathways for these students. And if you'd like to hear more student success stories from Wilson, check out VR Workforce Studio.

ROB FROEHLICH: Debby, that was so helpful in clearing up a lot of details and giving us some additional information. When we began the webinar, I mentioned we'd be talking a bit about business supports and a multitude of related topics. My colleagues, Diane McBride from Virginia DBVI, LaPearl Smith from Virginia DARS, and Tish Harris from Virginia DBVI, know a good bit about these crucial areas. Diane, LaPearl, Tish, I'm wondering if you might share some thoughts on these topics with us, and let's start off with Diane. Could you tell us a bit about how diversity and inclusion in the workforce relate to the Virginia CPID approach?

DIANE MCBRIDE: Absolutely Rob, thank you. Business is recognizing that a diverse workforce is good for business. In a recent study completed by Accenture and in partnership with Disability In and the American Association of People with Disabilities, or AAPD, it was found that companies that embrace best practices for employing and supporting persons with disabilities in their workforce have been outperforming their peers in the areas of higher revenue, net income, and better performance on profit margin.

By offering diversity and inclusion workshops to business, our agencies are able to help business create a positive working environment for their employees through education. Business develops a better understanding of diversity in today's workplace and the very talented pool of applicants that are available to them.

Another workshop that we have been requested to provide is an onboarding workshop for current workplace teams. The teams may have had little or no past experience with a person with a disability. We have experienced firsthand how nervous some employees feel about working with a person with a disability. Their nervousness is usually attributed to a fear of saying the wrong thing or concern as to what is the correct etiquette in assisting someone with a disability. We are able to relieve these fears and break down those misconceptions through education, and hopefully encourage more hires of persons with disabilities in their company.

Also, more businesses are reaching out to our agencies for assistance with job retention. It may be a current employee who has experienced a worsening condition or an employee who has developed a disability is having a challenge in performing their job tasks. We are able to work with the employer and employee to educate and support them with information about accommodations and services that may improve their performance. It may be that a different position is the best solution for the employee, and again, we will work with the employee and business to support them with the possible change.

I now would like to talk about section 503. Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act calls for a workforce that consists of 7% of people with disabilities. The regulations took effect March 24th, 2014, and apply to federal agencies and federal contractors. At that time, the utilization goal was 8% but has since been reduced. Agencies and contractors are not mandated to meet this goal but are required to keep records of measurements of their efforts to meet the goal.

The Schedule A letter is used by federal agencies to assist the agencies in reaching their utilization goals. Certified vocational rehabilitation counselors are able to file a Schedule A letter, thus our agencies are able to provide direct recruitment. The Schedule A letter is a document that demonstrates the applicant's eligibility for Schedule A non-competitive hiring. It serves as proof of the applicant's disability and is provided to the federal agency prior to the applicant being hired.

Many federal agencies, through their selective hiring managers, will directly recruit from our agency. It allows the job seeker with a disability to directly apply without going through the

federal recruitment site, USAjobs. Agencies may ask for Schedule A applications before even posting for an open position, thus giving the person with a disability or a veteran an advantage.

Federal agencies and contractors were also used diversity and inclusion workshops as well as hiring events to attain their measurement goals. Recently, and although they are not a federal agency, DC Government has adopted Schedule A recruitment. Other county governments are considering doing the same.

ROB FROEHLICH: Thanks, Diane. Now, LaPearl, I understand that you know a great deal about accessibility of the workplace and accommodations. Would you mind sharing some of that knowledge and your CPID experiences with us?

LAPEARL SMITH: I'd be happy to Rob, thank you so much. One of the areas that has equalled the playing field for persons with disabilities in the workplace is accessibility and accommodations. Vocational rehabilitation agencies like Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitation Services and Virginia Department for Blind and Vision Impaired have staff whose sole purpose is to evaluate, make recommendations, design, and assist consumers with the tools and modifications needed to facilitate success in the workplace.

With the use of this universal design, assistive technology, adaptive equipment, and workplace and home modifications, the percentage of persons with disabilities entering the workforce and maintaining success in their careers has dramatically increased.

Universal design is defined as "design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people." Items like automatic doors and even our Androids and smartphones are considered universal design because they can be adapted to serve all persons regardless of the ability or the challenge.

Assistive technology includes devices like smart pens that can record meetings, lectures, and conversations, or audible software like JAWS, which is used by many persons with vision impairments. These are just some of the ways that persons with disabilities have been able to have greater access to the areas of education and the workforce.

Adaptive equipment such as Braille keyboards and raised workstations like the Varidesk are just some of the examples of adaptive equipment used both in the home and the workplace. Workplace and home modifications encompass a wide array including handicap accessible showers, ramps for home entrances, modified sensory lighting and sound.

These are just some, to name a few, that have given persons with disabilities a greater edge in their ability to work successfully. I might add that our rehab teams have specifically designed gadgets and other items that our job seekers use that allow them to meet the job functions. All these have created a win-win not only for the employees, but for the companies who employ these candidates as well.

Now let's talk a little bit about information on cost of accommodations. One of the common questions that human resource and business managers ask when we are presented on engagement and the employment of persons with disabilities is, how much does the accommodation cost?

We take great pride in allaying fears by saying most accommodations cost little or nothing. Very rarely will an accommodation cost more than \$1,000, and in most cases the cost is under 500. And in many cases, cost nothing at all. What is even nicer is that candidates working with VR agencies like DARS and DBVI have the backing of these agencies to assist with providing accommodations at no cost to the companies who hire these candidates.

We have found that by engaging with businesses during our disability etiquette and engagement presentations, our agency-sponsored job fairs, business tours for our consumers and staff, as well as tours for businesses at our Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center, along with inviting managers and business persons to present at our employment workshops, the folks that make the hiring decisions are able to see firsthand the professionalism and abilities of our candidates and realize that there are many commonalities between them.

Recently, the assistive technology and rehabilitation team for DBVI and DARS gave a presentation to the human resources staff from Fairfax County Government. This presentation included devices and equipment and created items that our rehab team has used to design for our consumers. The HR team was amazed at all that they saw and they had the opportunity to hold, touch, and experience these items. This created an opened the door for us to work with the County HR in referring more of our candidates. I'm happy to add that one of our candidates from the Alexandria office was recently employed by the Fairfax County government.

ROB FROEHLICH: Thanks, LaPearl. By the way, I want our listeners to know that our next webinar, webinar three of the series of four, deals directly with accessibility and ways we've made the various pieces of the puzzle more accessible to our CPID participants. So stay tuned for that. Now Diane, we mentioned the concept of filling gaps in the job seeker pipeline a few times today. Would you mind sharing some thoughts on that topic with us?

DIANE MCBRIDE: I would love to, Rob. Quite often a participant will come to us with an unclear goal for employment. It may be that they are returning to the workforce after a long absence, or someone who recognizes that they cannot go back to the job that they were doing before developing a disability.

An example would be someone who has recently lost their vision, and in their previous employment they were employed as, say, a truck driver. By setting up a job shadow, informational interviews, and unpaid work experiences, the participants have the opportunity to explore different careers before making the decisions upon which path they wish to take.

We also encourage our college students to take part in paid internships that are offered by companies and federal agencies. By focusing on the interests of the job seeker and giving them



the opportunity to explore career pathways, we are able to gear training to specific segments of business such as information technology and advanced manufacturing. Career exploration provides information for our students and job seekers about credentials needed and the path that the individual can embark upon to obtain a career job. Ultimately, the student or job seeker will begin a job search with a resume filled with relevant work experience from their internships, volunteering experiences, and credentials.

DBVI and DARS focus on matching the individual to the job, not the job to the individual. This prevents the possibility of setting the individual and the business up for failure. The goal is to establish a long term relationship with business that will result in many successful hires. Recognizing how important it is for individuals to gain work experience while obtaining credentials, DBVI has partnered with a staffing agency to develop a paid internship program. The CPID program is also embarking upon this relationship to develop paid internships.

The staffing agency provides the workers compensation insurance and payroll. This program has been extremely successful in giving the individual the opportunity to gain onsite work experience, and in many cases, an offer of employment. It is a win-win for all.

An example is a young client who was co-enrolled with both DARS and DBVI. She attended Wilson Workforce Rehabilitation Center where she worked on her CNA certification, or certified nursing assistant certification. To complete her certification, she needed to gain actual practice hours. We were able to set her up with a paid internship with a local retirement facility where she worked and achieved her certification. She was then hired into a job making a livable wage. The CNA is part of the credential pathway as she can work on other credentials, such as med tech or LPN.

ROB FROEHLICH: That is such helpful information, Diane, thank you. Before we move in to our next point, I want to talk a little bit about the northern Virginia Tech Council. The Northern Virginia Technology Council, or NVTC, is the membership and trade association for the technology community in northern Virginia.

As the largest technology council of the nation, NVTC serves about 1,000 companies and organizations including businesses from all sectors of the technology industry, service providers, universities, foreign embassies, non-profit organizations, and government agencies. Through its member companies, NVTC represents about 300,000 employees in the region. I'm wondering-- LaPearl, would you mind, could you tell us a bit about how this group relates to the Virginia CPID approach?

LAPEARL SMITH: Sure, Rob, I'd be happy to. About three years ago, our agencies through the CPID grant, became members of the Northern Virginia Technology Council. As Rob mentioned, this organization is one of the largest of its kind in the United States and represents over 1,000 technology firms and businesses in the greater metropolitan Washington area and beyond. The council and government can be an advocate for these companies in advancing technology

trends and the skills that are needed to meet the ever-changing demands of technology in our society and especially in the workplace.

Through this membership, we have participated in their Titan's Breakfast event where our assistive technology and business relations staff had opportunities to demonstrate our AT equipment, answer numerous questions about what we do, and more so, engage with businesses that are looking for new resources to obtain qualified employees.

Earlier this year my colleague, Diane McBride, and I presented to the NVTC board of the directors on disability engagement in the workplace. This board is comprised of CEOs and managers from companies like Microsoft, Amazon, and SAIC to name a few. Because of this opportunity, Microsoft met with our staff regarding their hire autism initiative. We also participated in webinars that were made available to NVTC members on topics related to 503 compliance, assistive technology and accommodations, and disability engagement in the workplace.

This connection with NVTC has proven to be a valuable collaboration for DBVI, DARS, and the CPID initiative. We collaborated along with our WIOA partners to create a catalog of business services available to companies that are actively seeking to diversify their workforce.

ROB FROEHLICH: LaPearl, thanks for sharing all of that energy going on with that group and amongst your collaborators, too. Now, Tish, I think you mentioned to me that there are a few new and value-added approaches you wanted to discuss with our listeners. Would you mind telling us a little bit about one of them?

TISH HARRIS: I would be happy to--

ROB FROEHLICH: --or some of them.

TISH HARRIS: One of the great things about our grant is that we get to pilot some new, outside of our usual agency operations. A few events that we came up with include credential fairs, and open houses to disseminate career pathway information, provide resources, and help with next steps. These were a great resource for both counselors and the individuals we serve, especially with the IT career pathways.

The credential fairs were set up so that once our individuals decided they had an interest, people were on hand to walk them through any paperwork, set an appointment for a vocational evaluation if needed, determine the best training suited for them, and then move forward with the next steps. We can help with registration paperwork or we can help with tuition assistance. This allowed us to capitalize on the momentum picked up at the event. Instead of someone leaving and then we asked them to contact one person to get help with one thing, another person to get helped with another. So it was a warm handoff.

At our IT credential fair, we had 106 individuals signed in to join us for a pizza lunch and to hear about IT careers. Our keynote address was from Prem Jadhvani of Intellectual Point who is one of our trainers. For him as a keynote was a huge draw for us because he is working on a six billion dollar cloud project with Amazon and everyone wants to hear from a winner.

Representatives from IT training companies gave an overview of credentials along the pathway and Virginia Career Works, Virginia Assistive Technology, DARS, and DBVI were present at resource tables. We had a scavenger hunt for students who joined us for the event, since had several schools who sent bus loads of students.

We sent everyone home with goody bags provided by Hershey Chocolate and McKee's Little Debbie cakes, so we ended the event on a sweet note. At our welding credential fair, Newport News Shipbuilding sponsored our event to showcase the opportunities for welders, which again is a critical demand in the tidewater area.

A logistics credential fair was held at Blue Ridge Community College to showcase the in-demand fields of logistics. We had three businesses on hand, a small, a medium, and a large logistic to speak to credentials, skills, and the demand in their business. All three businesses, regardless of the size, agreed that the credential training was very attractive to them and would give the candidate the edge over any other candidate who applied.

These open houses were just a phenomenal way to attract people, to get them to hear the information, and to get them to consider possible careers, as well as the training needed for those careers. We also wanted them to have everything they needed to take the next step to get started. Thanks to the open houses, we've had numerous individuals begin career training with credentials.

ROB FROEHLICH: So, Tish, another thing that you and I-- well, another grouping of things that you and I talked about as value-added-- Kind of leads off with one of the initial activities we launched upon beginning the CPID project was to pull the workforce development partners-- vocational rehabilitation, adult education, the workforce boards, community college representatives-- we pulled them all together in regional groups. My colleagues and I worked on facilitating a professional development series amongst these professionals with two main objectives.

First, we intended to introduce a common language for these partners to use when working with individuals who receive services concurrently from the partner entities. That common language was motivational interviewing. Motivational interviewing is a collaborative goal-oriented style of communication with particular attention paid to the language of change. It is designed to strengthen personal motivation for and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person's own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion.



So through a series of in-person sessions followed up by a process of submission of recorded audio tapes reviewed for proficiency by our MI certified colleagues at GW, participants demonstrated proficiency on the various motivational interviewing techniques. In addition to the MI, we also focused the professional development seminars with labor market information and tools designed to allow participants to more fully understand the concept of a career pathways approach.

I mentioned there's a second main objective, too. The second main objective was to enhance contacts among the workforce development partners and to build or deepen connections and relationships among these systems. By doing so, we enhanced systems alignment and fostered greater understanding among the partner systems.

Beyond that, in terms of learning opportunities for individuals, CPID has been working with students at Wilson Workforce Rehabilitation Center as well as others to create a powerful resumes and to learn to answer questions in behavioral interviewing using the STAR method. We encourage students to take four to five memorable accomplishments with either their work, volunteering, or school, and to create STARs for them. And STAR is an acronym that means S, situation, the situation in effect at the time. T, task, a task I was given. A, action, the action I took. And R, results, or the results I got.

For example, one of the WWRC students used this approach as follows. Situation was that our storage room was cluttered and people who needed supplies and equipment could never find it. The task I was given was to create order out of the chaos so that we could put our hands on equipment and supplies when we needed them.

The action I took was to remove everything, throw out outdated or broken pieces, organize the equipment and supplies by use, record them, and create an inventory sign up sheet. When someone took something from the room, they signed it out, and signed it back and upon return. This way, if another student or teacher needed that equipment, they knew who to ask. The result was that we now have order, we can find supplies, and we don't waste time looking through a junky room trying to find what we need.

Beyond the STAR interview techniques, we also used an approach called reverse job fairs. Reverse job fairs are events where job seekers are gathered in clusters around specific career skill sets or accomplishments. Business representatives then navigate through the room and stopped to speak with the job fair attendees that are looking for a career and have skill sets in which the recruiter seeks candidates.

So, beyond these things, LaPearl and Tish, as we move forward, I think it might be helpful for you all to share a bit about career exploration and CPID participants. First, LaPearl, would you mind talking to adult career education? And then Tish, would you mind letting us know about career exploration as students?

LAPPEARL SMITH: Yes, Rob, I would be very happy to. Another one of our business partnerships that has been most valuable is our cooperation with Global Connections for Employment, or GCE. Their northern Virginia location focuses primarily on information technology training, that leads to certifications in business analysis, software testing, and business information systems.

Last fall, the chief technology manager for the IT division facilitated a week-long training for adult candidates that had demonstrated the aptitude and interest in various IT fields, but needed to gain more knowledge about the specific skills and qualifications needed for some of the areas of IT. The week-long training included hardware and computer networking, software applications, data management and data science, and culminated in cybersecurity analysis. The training included hands-on exercises and opportunities for candidates to engage in individual and group activity.

At the intro to IT, the instructor also gave an assessment to each candidate to determine if the person had aptitude to continue on with specific certification programs leading to IT certifications. The instructor did a masterful job in working with a diverse group of candidates with varying disabilities, and he was able to keep the class engaged and interested throughout the week.

The exposure gave opportunities for candidates to make informed choices regarding careers in the IT field and the specific skills that are needed. I also would like to add that this partnership with GCE has led to successful employment for many of our candidates through their information technology training program.

TISH HARRIS: I'd also like to talk a little bit about career exploration for students. Earlier, I spoke to building the pipeline for the future. We did so with hands-on career exploration through our academy. Our youth career explorations included a number of different opportunities, from one day health care pathways overview, to welding, coding, software analysts, manufacturing, and Robotics Academy.

We spent quite a bit of time creating academy experiences for high school students that provide hands-on opportunities that allow them to use a variety of learning styles to successfully try out some of these careers. We found that often our students either cannot or will not access CTE programs at their high schools, either due to lack of time in the school day or to low confidence and success.

I'd like to share an experience with our Robotics Academy with you as an example of the power of hands-on career exploration. I was tasked with coming up with a fully accessible, high-quality residential academy that will allow our students with disabilities access to curriculum that was already embraced by the Virginia Department of Education for their summer IT camps.

Thankfully, we found a great partner in Dr. Chuck Gardner with the National Integrated Cyber Education and Research Center, or NICERC. Dr. Gardner took the curriculum that was used in

the summer camps that he created for the Department of Ed, made it non-visual and fully accessible, and embedded STEM instruction into the program.

Our students were learning to code, building a bot from the box, and then calculating the speed of light and sound to add accessories on so that the bot performed multiple functions. Students even went out on their own one evening to research how to code music notes, and when we got to the classroom the next morning, their bots treated us to a song as we entered.

We've had two cohorts in the Robotics Academy with the third happening this summer. I'd like to mention a few of the other academies that we've done successfully. Welding and 3D printing were presented in partnership with community colleges where each student took home something they created. DNC machining was presented in conjunction with a technical center. The water filtration academy where students converted solar to drive a water filtration system, they created a process to clean and bottle water, and that one was presented with Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center to develop an interest in manufacturing.

Are these academies worth the time, the money, and the energy? Yes, absolutely. Follow up on our robotics participants from the first cohort in 2017 showed that 90% of students who attended our Robotics Academy had accessed a career pathway through credential training, two- or four-year college, or by going directly into employment. Hands-on career exploration increases confidence and allows our youth to make informed choices.

With a younger cohort in 2018, I have to wait a little bit longer for some to determine their pathways. But at this point in time, our conversion rate with them is at 81% less than a year later. So in case I still haven't convinced you yet, I want to finish up by reading an email from one of our robotic students.

"Hey, Tish, I'm sorry I haven't gotten back to you yet. I've been busy lately. I now have a job. I also have a car and an apartment. I'm entering a new chapter in my life and it's been exciting. I won't forget where this journey began. Thanks for playing a role in it." You see, hands-on career exploration really does work.

ROB FROEHLICH: Trish, those numbers are great, and that follow up information from your candidate drives home the point that you're trying to make there. That's what we're all trying to do with folks. So it's not uncommon for there to be a competitive spirit or an approach using silos when implementing projects. Diane, I wonder if you wouldn't mind talking a bit about how that's been resolved among the Virginia CPID collaborative.

DIANE MCBRIDE: Absolutely, Rob. Prior to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, many agency partners worked in silos, as you just mentioned, with little interaction. Now, all core programs funded under WIOA, or Title I-IV, share planning at the state and local level, and share the same performance indicators and reporting requirements such as employment rate, median earnings, skill gains, percentage of participants who are in a program leading to either a

post-secondary credential or employment, thus encouraging our agencies and partners to work more closely together.

Our agencies advocate for all individuals with disabilities-- not just our own participants-- by collaborating on opportunities with business on initiatives that will benefit all. Partners work together to ensure that the needs of the individual are being met by referrals to other agencies or partners for co-enrollment. It may be that we identify that a participant is a veteran and would benefit from the Virginia Employment Commission veteran representative as well as DBVI services or DARS services. This ensures that partners are able to tap into all resources needed and available for the job seeker to be successful.

One of the greatest partnerships that we have developed in recent years is that between our two agencies, DARS and DBVI. DARS hosts a very successful federal job club in their Alexandria office where many job seekers have been hired into career jobs with the federal government and business. DBVI job seekers are also able to attend this job club and have benefited from securing jobs with agencies such as Department of Labor, Department of Transportation, and Department of Homeland Security, just to name a few.

We talked about the success of our involvement in the Northern Virginia Tech Council event, which has certainly been beneficial to our individuals. Sharing our knowledge of assistive technology with agencies and business has led to hiring managers and HR professionals feeling more confident about hiring a person with a disability.

Along with community partners, our agencies participate in a number of workforce boards employer solution teams or business services teams across northern Virginia and the state. Partners meet monthly to share information about employment in the region, employment activities being held such as hiring events and workforce data. Members of the team share information about business contacts and who is a single point of contact for that particular business.

The goal is to reduce the number of agency or partners knocking on the same door, but rather someone on the team is deemed a single point of contact and makes introductions as needed for team members. We are also able to share with business all the resources that are available through our partners on the team. Collaboration between partner agencies and partners has ensured the success for many of our job seekers.

ROB FROEHLICH: Thanks, Diane. That's important information relevant to the project too. We are just about to the end of our time together, but we like to close these CPID webinars by sharing some additional sources of information with you all. We talked about at great many topics today and we wanted to share some resources with you all in case you want to learn a little bit more about those topics.

We've included some web links that may help you find more valuable information. Slide 28 contains links to the WINTAC site, National TA Center to assist state VR agencies and their



partners on implementing WIOA, a link to the Virginia Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities website, and the Career Index website, the tool that we've mentioned relative to labor market information and all sorts of other helpful information as well.

Slide 30 contains links to the WINTAC Career Pathways Community of Practice, the Lead Center's Inclusive Career Pathways Desktop Guide, and the Department of Labor Career Pathways Toolkit. Slide 31 it includes links to the Career Pathways Joint Federal Agency Letter, the LINCS Career Pathways Checklist, some Day in the Life video resources, and additional LINCS resources on career pathways.

And then finally, slide 32 includes the resources Debby Hopkins referred to as she presented on the topic of apprenticeships. First is a link to the VR Workforce studio podcasts, including success stories. These resources also include the US Department of Labor, policy and technical assistance resources, a link to apprenticeship.gov and all the resources available there, Jobs for the Future non-profit resources, and a link to the Society for Human Resource Management article that Debby mentioned as well.

Finally, slide 33 contains contact information for all of today's presenters and this information will be posted on the event website redundantly immediately below the webinar as well. I want to thank you for carving out some time to hear about the Virginia CPID project and a demand side approach. We hope we provided some information that will be useful to you as you carry out your work targeted toward meeting the employment-related needs of individuals with disabilities. As we noted, please feel free to contact any of the presenters if you have any questions.