ROUGHLY EDITED TRANSCRIPT

 CIL‑NET ‑ IL CONVERSATION

BECOMING THE DUCT TAPE OF DISABILITY IN YOUR AREA: THE ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF A MICROBUSINESS AND IMPROVISATIONAL APPROACH TO YOUR CIL

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>> Thanks for joining us. We will go ahead and get started at 1:00 Mountain Time. If you need to speak with me or anybody beforehand, you can press star 2 to unmute.

>> Good afternoon, Mary!

>> MARY OLSON: Sorry. I just realized I was on mute when I was telling you that, Jim, we have a couple of folks on the line with us, and I'm excited you could make it. Thanks for agreeing to talk about this subject, and we'll get started about 1:00.

>> JIM: Okay. That's about five minutes your time?

>> MARY OLSON: Yep. Yeah, five, six minutes.

>> JIM: Okay. I'll be here. So if you don't hear anything, don't worry.

>> MARY OLSON: All right.

>> JIM: I'm ready. It's all good.

>> MARY OLSON: For those of you who are just joining us, we will wait a couple more minutes to let others join on the call. We will get started about 1:00 Mountain Time. And if you have anything that you would like to say or speak with me, the moderator, you can press star two and that raises your hand so I know you have something to say.

Good afternoon, folks. We still have some people joining us. We'll go ahead and I'll start my little introduction spiel here. We will give it one more minute and then we'll get ready to roll.

Okay. I will go ahead and start my introduction piece as folks are joining us. Good afternoon. My name is Mary Olson. I'm the director of training and technical assistance for APRIL. Thanks for joining us today. This call is on "The Economic Benefits of a Microbusiness and Improvisational Approach to Your CIL." If you need CART today, please go to the APRIL website, at www.APRIL‑rural.org and follow the link on the home page.

If you have trouble accessing it, you can always email me at Mary.Olson@mso.umt.edu. And I can send you a link to that.

Today's call will be recorded, thanks to Bill. Thanks, Bill Cochrane at SKIL. And the audio recording and the transcript will be available online at our website under the IL conversations tab following the call.

During today's conversation, if at any time you would like to add to our topic, from your experiences or ask questions for our speaker, please press star 2 on your phone, and that lets me know that you are raising your hand and I can make your line live.

After you are done with your question or your comment, and you don't have anything else to say, go ahead and press star 2 again and that will lower your hand and that way, I won't keep opening up your line.

And also, I just want to let you know that I'm using yet again, a new line ‑‑ a new system today and so I appreciate you learning with me as I learn the new technology.

You can evaluate our website on our website under the IL conversations tab. Your feedback is really important. You know, we know that sometimes there are glitches and we are always looking for ways to make us better. So definitely, please, if you have a chance after the call, fill out that short survey for us.

Support for this conversation has been provided by the US Department of Health and Human Services and the Administration for Community Living. No official endorsements of the Department of Health and Human Services should be inferred.

And without any further information, I'm going to introduce you to your presenter. So today we have on the call with us Jim Whalen, and Jim is the executive director of Blue Water Center for Independent Living in Michigan. And for three decades, Jim has promoted the value of teaching and learning to fuel purpose‑driven creativity. Jim has introduced new and creative idea through over 20 statewide regional and national workshops and training experiences.

He holds academic degrees in communications, counseling, personnel services, college student development and higher education, combined with real world experience in small business ownership, state agency, university and CIL settings and has provided a wealth of perspectives that now allow insights into how to develop coordinated program efforts rather than being open to the risk of institutionalizing services that are not market relevant for enough of a time period to justify their development and existence.

Wow!

I'm excited for today.

So with that, Jim, I will go ahead and let you take it away, and, again, I will remind our callers that if at any time you want to add to our conversation, just press star two. Thanks!

>> JIM WHALEN: Well, good morning, Hawaii, if there's anybody out there, otherwise, various states of good afternoon across the country.

I really want to start by saying a couple of things prefaced to even launching into the topic. One is a matter of process. I take the term "conversation" literally as opposed to lecture or any other derivation of listening to myself talk. And then secondly, I think those who know me know that it's more exciting to me to offer a lot of different perspectives in that we are here to learn and fit what fits for our particular community, our particular ‑‑ (No audio).

>> MARY OLSON: Jim, are you still there? Hmm. Jim?

Well, Jim is coming back with us. I will just go ahead and remind some folks that are on the line, that are just joining us, if you want to add anything to the conversation at all, just go ahead and press star two, and that will raise your hand and I can unmute you and it looks like we have our first hand raiser. Let me see how good I am at this. All right, caller, you are open.

>> PARTICIPANT: Hey, um, I just wanted to let you know, Mary, we're not hearing Jim on this end either. So ‑‑

>> MARY OLSON: Okay.

>> PARTICIPANT: So it's not just you.

>> MARY OLSON: Well, good. I thought maybe I was just ‑‑

>> JIM WHALEN: I will call in on my cell phone. Maybe that will help.

>> MARY OLSON: Oh, Jim, you are back!

>> JIM WHALEN: Can you hear me now?

>> MARY OLSON: We can hear you now.

>> JIM WHALEN: Okay. I threatened to call in on my cell phone. Okay. I will start again.

This is a ‑‑ this is a conversation rather than a lecture. If you wanted one of those, I could provide it as well, but there are no drinks involved or anything like that. So it might be really dry. But having said that, I do want it to be a conversation and secondly, the things we talk about, of course, are for you to take back and use the Playdough effect that you need to do to make it work where you are, because that's what this whole IL experience is about, making ‑‑ making paths to being involved in communities where people live or of their choice, not necessarily what Jim or any other person in the field says is the way to go here.

Having said those two things, I have to start with a bit of philosophy and, you know, when some people hear philosophy, they think nap time, and I don't blame them, but I think in this particular instance, it really ‑‑ it really is a good idea to start with philosophy. A lot of times when someone sees the word "economic" or "business," or the words "fee for service," they are thinking generating revenue. How do I get more money for my CIL sort of ideas and those are true here, but I just violated one of my own tenets. Those are true here, and ‑‑ and I'm going to give you a way to sort of mesh what might be traditional IL philosophy with the idea of developing programs that aren't the specific goal of one consumer.

But I want to start with the idea that it is in line with IL philosophy. If you look at it in a certain way, okay, microbusinesses are not large scale. They are not institutionalized in many ways. They are more or less the Wall Street version of a lemonade stand. Microbusinesses are small, market driven, easy to assemble, easy to start, can be thought of as trial or pilot sort of endeavors and basically they are driven by market forces.

Now, my enthusiasm for this has to do with the philosophical basis and there will be those who debate that, hey, what's ‑‑ you know, what does that have to do with sort of individual or, you know ‑‑ aren't centers supposed to just look at individual goals and those sorts of things? So I want to start with saying when I talk about a microbusiness approach, what I'm talking about here is that the target audience is not the consumer per se. The target audience is the community in which you live. And the market space is in, economic terms, the market space is in that ‑‑ is in that barrier that you want to eliminate. Right?

So that's ‑‑ that's where we are at. We are in that space, the one that we want to eliminate becomes your market. And if, in fact, you can make money at ‑‑ during the process of eliminating that barrier, that's what you want to look at for market and that's what you want to look at microbusiness as. Okay?

So that's the philosophical basis. It's not at all how we make money off of consumers. That's sort of a ridiculous concept and I know it's become one of ‑‑ a topic of debate among centers, as we try to figure out how to gather resources to do the many things that we do. Unfortunately ‑‑ unfortunately for some centers in this state and around the country, we have a situation where in order to gather, gain resources, programs have become pretty well established, and centers can say, well, that's the other side of our center that does that, but whether or not those things are independent and individual, who knows.

You know, if you do home care in one side of your center's business plan and you do IL services on the other side, who knows. People are people. But this is not about that sort of fee for service and this is ‑‑ this is about the community as a target for microbusiness ideas, okay?

So it's about as strong philosophically as it can be and if ‑‑ if one wants to talk about or at least share any ideas on that debate, in terms of what's happening in their part of the world, in terms of balance of ideas between consumer, control and programming, that's fine. I'll be more than happy to talk about that, but for right now, I want you to think that microbusiness doesn't mean establishing a $2 million program to get $50 an hour from a state agency to serve consumers in any way, shape or form. That's not what the microbusiness idea is. So I want to start with that as ‑‑ as throwing that out there. Basically that's where I want to start and if anybody has any comments, questions, I'm going to allow one minute for hands to go up and I would like to see if that happens.

>> MARY OLSON: Thanks, Jim. And, again, for that hand to go up, you need to press star two on your phone or if you are joining us via chat, go ahead and just type in your question and I will be moderating and voicing those.

I feel like I should have some "Jeopardy" music or something in the background, while we are waiting.

>> JIM WHALEN: Well, having heard none, I will probably move ahead, but ‑‑

>> MARY OLSON: Go ahead, Jim and move ahead and I will let you know, as soon as one shows up.

>> JIM WHALEN: Okay. Well, I guess ‑‑ I guess starting from the idea that what we're looking at is targeting communities versus individuals, I think what we ‑‑ what we want to focus on is the process of developing a microbusiness. Okay? And so I think what we want to look at is the processes that you have to have, and then sort of talk in specifics, if anyone has an idea that they are working on, maybe we can go through in terms of just helping grow one at a time. And I will give the example of the program that we are currently looking at in our center as a microbusiness, okay?

In our schools, our transition services, our services to youth with disabilities, we're, what I would call, substandard. And far too many students were getting through with their high school experience without any viable transition options. Not doing much of anything, except for getting their certificate of completion or getting their degree and setting open the couch. So looking at that as a center, we as a staff sat down and said, you know, what can we do? What can we do to change that issue and then how do we resource that? Okay?

So what we decided is we need direct intervention. We need direct intervention in the school and with those students. Okay? We had to start there because we had an historical issue of students being underserved it.

Wasn't just getting out of the community and make nests for those students to land. It was sort of everything. So what could we do to start and then what would have to happen for this to be successful? So our first sort of task in terms of developing the microbusiness of transition, so to speak, was to look at, you know, what we had in terms of resources on our staff to actually plug into what I would call the microbusiness of transition.

And we, while we had some folks who had worked with youth before, had no scheme, had no ‑‑ had no curriculum, had no way of going from where we were, to where we needed to be without getting some outside training. So there was just no way for the people who were here to train enough, to fast enough, to meet that ‑‑ start meeting that need.

So the first thing we did was we called in ‑‑ we called in APRIL's youth peer‑to‑peer and got some people sort of up to speed in a hurry. Okay? We got our company, so to speak, able to do something to provide some service very quickly because we couldn't even get out into the schools legitimately and say we can provide this yet. We knew the need existed. We knew the market was there. We just couldn't fill that market. Okay? So that's the first thing we had to do, was hook at how we resource things. And when I say resource, I don't mean how we pay, how we pay for it. I mean, how do we ‑‑ well, I guess in a sense, how do we develop the human capital so ‑‑ how do we develop the machine, if we were making snow cones where do we get a snow cone machine? In this case, my staff will love me because I just referred to them as snow cone machines, but in this case we had an available source, we had APRIL peer‑to‑peer for youth that got us materials‑wise light years ahead but got us enthusiasm, ready to go ahead and sell this thing. Okay?

So that was step one, starting with the internal resources, the internal stuff. Why do you start there versus, you know, looking at the community? Because you can oftentimes control and plan that segment of it, right? As a center, you can say here's what we have. Here's where we need to go with that. And so that was our first step, looking at the available internal resources for generating a product, if you will, in this case, transition, for, you know, a target audience, schools in our communities. Also we looked internally and we were able to do that training. Okay, one we were in the process of that, we then started ‑‑ before we ‑‑ you know, day one, we then started our marketing process, saying we can do this for you.

Now, did we already know that was something that was needed? Yes, we did. Right? So we could just go out and find the people who would say, yep, that's exactly what we need. Okay? We need this sort of training with our students and in our communities, okay? So then you have that ‑‑ so I guess in a sense, to make a microbusiness successful, to make any fee‑for‑service program successful, you have to have already in place something that somebody needs. You cannot ‑‑ you cannot go looking for ‑‑ you cannot go the opposite direction. You can't be successful in hooking for dollars and then say, well, here's some dollars to do window washing. My Center for Independent Living now wants to be a window washing business. And the reason you can't or you shouldn't is what if your window washing contract then becomes four times more valuable than your IL stuff?

Because if your window washing contract then becomes four times more valuable, it's far more likely that you will become a window washing facility than a Center for Independent Living service. Money counts. It's really difficult for board members to make decisions based on independent living philosophy versus based on, boy, isn't that a nice fountain we have in front of our building?

So I'm saying, you have to identify the need and you have to have the technology ready to do it. If you let the resource dollars shape your staff and shape your staff philosophy and your staff activities. If it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, it's probably a duck and not a CIL.

Anyway, we did this. We got some people trained to do what philosophically we thought ought to be done. Then we ‑‑

>> MARY OLSON: Sorry. I just wanted to quickly say, first of all, what you are saying, I just have to say it because in the grant world, we call it chasing money for money's sake.

>> JIM WHALEN: Yes.

>> MARY OLSON: So you never want to chase a grant that really doesn't have anything to do with what you might already think about offering because it ends up being a game of chase.

And then while I'm talking, I just wanted to say, there were a couple more folks who joined us on the call. For those of you who don't know if you want to join the conversation, press star 2 to raise your hand and let us know you have a comment. Thanks, Jim.

>> JIM WHALEN: And to piggyback on Mary which is one of my new least favorite sayings because piggybacking on people seems like sort of a bad image for some people that I know.

So to connect with our moderator, at any time anybody wants to comment or has a question, like I said at the outset, this is a conversation and I have this conversation in my head all the time, and doing it out loud doesn't really mean much to me without input from somebody else.

However, having said that, yeah, what I'm saying is chasing grant money for things that you don't really want to do, but you are just chasing it for the dollars isn't what I'm talking about here. I'm talking about an identified need in the community, that is a barrier to participation for people as a source of an opportunity, and so then back to my example of what we ‑‑ what we have done for transition, for instance.

So we were able to go to the schools and say, we have this curriculum. We have this approach. We have staff ready to come do this, this next semester and we, you know, put our program in front of people, and the response was immediately positive and the response for those people who weren't positive by us was okay. You know, they are not ready for this yet. We may have to do some more market development. We may have to use a few programs as pilots. We may have to do this, but we did get quite a few positive responses.

So we started. What one of the ‑‑ one of the hallmarks of microbusiness is that you have to also, once you have identified the mark and you have gotten some resources ready to go, you have to jump in. You have to jump in and go. And do they sometimes not work out? Yes, sometimes they don't work out.

The beauty of the microbusiness versus the full pledged programming effort is that you haven't built a wing in your center dedicated to that particular thing. You haven't done bricks and mortar. You haven't got people making $40 an hour coming into your center to make $40 an hour that in a year you will have to let go. All right? I mean, it's not that kind of thinking. Okay? Let's go at this thing and let's do it as an experiment, right? Let's see what happens.

Let's be ready to learn. Let's be ready to change quickly. Let's be ready to do all of those things versus let's see how many people we can put in cubicles, with what protocols, and what procedures. Let's not ‑‑ let's not at the first meeting, you know, worry about developing, you know, the bylaws. A lot of not for profits and other sorts of enterprises, you know, they just worry way too much, originally, about all of those trappings of establishment. Okay?

So when I'm talking about programs, a lot of times, especially microprogramming, you don't worry about the staff design so much. You don't worry about ‑‑ you may pick out a project leader, but beyond that, the organization of independent program at a microbusiness level is flat because you are not worried about those sorts of lines of command and those sorts of things. It's an experiment and somebody who is really good at something else, for instance, might be really good at housing, but likes the idea of working on transitions. They might not be very good at it, right? While, somebody who is very good at IL Skills training, you know, maybe computer training might be really good or it might be vice versa. But to worry about the structures of these programs at first is just sort of a folly. Because any time you structure somebody in an organization over somebody as a supervisor and then you have to switch that, that has long‑term consequences, right?

Somebody who was once somebody ace supervisor is not going to be so good as their subordinate or equal anymore. And so you ‑‑ you know, when you are talking about microprogramming, microbusiness approaches, you've got to just be able to let that go a little bit. So that's what we were looking at in terms some of structure. You have to be less structured. You have to be to make this work.

Back to our transition example. All right. So we have run this transition program for most of a semester, which is not an extremely long period of time. Well, it's great how it is. It's great how it is. But we want to expand it. It's great for the students. It's good. The communities are starting to give us lots of good feedback. In fact, communities 30 miles away are starting to say, come to our school. You know?

At that point, as an organization, we have to start thinking about, okay, we resourced ‑‑ we have resourced six schools to do this with four or five staff people doing it part time or more or less full time a couple, you know, but how do we resource every school?

Well, then we have to find ‑‑ then we have to find some dollars somewhere, you know? So we use our statistics which we'll talk about just briefly in a moment, to go to other people who are supposed to be doing what it is that we are doing right now. For instance, in our state, and every state, voc rehab is supposed to be doing transition, you know, at a greater level than what we have in the past.

So we get our affidavits and our data together and we go to our regional ‑‑ in our state, MRS, and we start talking about, you know, we know you have a need for this. So we're telling them what they need. And they know it, because we original highly educated thought about that before we even looked at the program, and we know that the consumers know it. And we say, you know, how does this fit? How can we make this fit into what you need? And, you know, right now, for instance, transition being one, there's some money to be had there, and it really looks like we will be able to, in the fall, resource some more activities in this regard because ‑‑ because these folks need these sorts of services. And if you look at the WIOA, the proportion of money that has to be comment on transition is pretty high. So that's another way to think of in terms of microenterprises. You look at what are some other market factors and you, you know, sort of experiment in that area.

Now, I never thought I would say this in a former HIV, but I will say it now. The more money there is available, the more little mistakes to get some more. Be thinking about ‑‑ be thinking about whether there's lots of available money, just ‑‑ just in terms ‑‑ just in terms of the latitude you will have to experiment. Not in terms of how much you can make, okay? Microbusiness success is not based on how much you can make. It's based on how many different things you can do to make something, and in this case, to make a certain number of barriers disappear. It's not how much ‑‑ in fact, I would say half of the centers that I know of who battle with the idea of fee for service and a number of other revenue‑generating ideas, they are far more focused on what they can get than what they can do.

And I think if you ‑‑ if you start looking at what you can get, more often than what you can do, one that's obvious to your consumers, it's also obvious to your community. It shuts down far more markets than it opens up, because the more you look at what you can get, the more competitors you will have. It's that simple. You know?

If you look at the unique things that you can do, you are far more ahead ‑‑ you are farther ahead than looking at what you can do better than somebody. Okay? So these are just philosophical things.

So for instance, we are back at ‑‑ (No audio).

>> MARY OLSON: Jim, I want to let you know that you are cutting in and out every once in a while. Like, if you are talking right now, we don't hear you.

While we are getting Jim kind of figured out here, I think this would be a great time to check in on the phone lines. Again, star two if you have something to add.

>> PARTICIPANT: Hello? Hey, this is Michael Beers from Missoula, Montana, I work for summit Independent Living Center. I wanted to second could some of Jim's comments about approaching VR and some of their new regulations with ideas.

So at our center, we are never short on ideas. We come up with great ideas all the time, but what we lack is money and with some of the changes in VR specific highly educated, the WIOA changes and the 15% that is allocated for young people, along with the pets program, that allows and mandate programs begin to serve young people in high school at the age of 14, and give them ‑‑ I think the language is employment exploration or job exploration. So getting away from this idea that to some extent we will discourage young people from gaining work experience, so they can then qualify for voc rehab support once they are transition age.

And personally, I always thought that was ridiculous because, you know, then they turn around and they say, well, why did this person fail in their job goal? Well, because they don't have any work experience. Now through some of these programs youth can gain a variety of work skills working up to their transition goal, which is really exciting for some of our young people.

But from a VR perspective, it's very scary because they have new mandates and new money, and not necessarily more time and people to do that, as counselors. Something we have begun to hook at and implement in our center is approaching them as a support with those ideas. So say, okay we know you can't do job explorations in ‑‑ for job placements in sites that serve some minimum wage. So that ‑‑ some minimum wage placement is no long her a viable VR outcome. So how can Independent Living Centers offer some of those work placements and work with VR to offer real, you know, soft skills building, supportive employment opportunities through your center and what they already do, or I think what Jim is talking about, is what ‑‑ you know, what makes sense to offer in addition to what we already do? You know, for example, a microbusiness, whatever it might be.

So, you know, those are some of the specific regulation changes that we have been able to talk to VR about and say, you know, we are all working with the new paint palate. Let's see what we can come up with together.

Do we have Jim yet?

And while we are waiting ‑‑ oh, yeah. If there are other centers ‑‑

>> MARY OLSON: Sorry, I was just going to add in that, you know, at this time, if other people have examples of what their center has been doing for microbusinesses. Part of what we were hoping today was even to do just some sharing. I will let Mike finish his example, but that gives you an opportunity to press star two and tell us about some things that you are doing as well.

>> PARTICIPANT: Yeah, no. I was pretty much done. I would be really interested if there are other centers on the call in various stages of similar things that they wanted to share.

>> MARY OLSON: Great. I know even our lovely folks at SKIL, who are doing recording for us today, they have microbusinesses, such as working online. Sorry, folks for the technical difficulties.

Jim, are you here? Hmm.

>> PARTICIPANT: So while we are waiting for Jim, Mary, I can elaborate a little bit more some things that we have done here through Summit. We have developed a program that we call Base, and that's essentially a satellite office to our center, where myself as the youth coordinator am the only one that staffs the location, and it's, you know, just to get an idea, it's a little over 2,000 square feet. It's a very open space that can be a classroom at any point and serves as my office. It allows us to do more youth programming during the day, like drop‑in, as opposed to appointment based. But the other thing that it opens us up for is work placement.

So I don't have someone to set up or clean up after different activities or do basic custodial work. So those all become work experiences that we can now offer young people that are either in high school or, you know, may be struggling to fill their takes, you know, post‑high school and we still need to keep up those soft skills and kind of that work ethic that we have heard from, you know, various sources that can deteriorate over time. So right, there without creating any new programming, you know, we become ‑‑ we become a satellite office with, you know, some very limited support from our peer program and our volunteers. We can offer, essential highly educated job coaching for those youth who may need it. You know, they are working alongside a young person but they are really doing the day‑to‑day operations for this site. And we don't handle any confidential information here or any of that. So we don't have to worry about that. It's really kind of a community space that they get to manage.

So that's been a lot of fun to see. We are only a few months into it, but we are getting more and more opportunities as ‑‑ as people get involved.

>> MARY OLSON: Great! It looks like we have a couple more hands that are up. Let's go ahead and unmute some folks.

>> PARTICIPANT: Hello. Hello.

>> MARY OLSON: Hi.

>> PARTICIPANT: Hi, this is Valerie from the Blue Water center. Can you hear me?

>> MARY OLSON: I can.

>> PARTICIPANT: Jim is trying. His phone is not working. He's trying to connect back up with you.

>> MARY OLSON: Great. Thank you.

And I saw that there was another caller that I unmuted. Go ahead and talk now.

>> PARTICIPANT: Hello?

>> MARY OLSON: Hi.

>> PARTICIPANT: I'm very interested in the home marketing piece. Our center a few years back really tried to work with the high schools in the area. We tried to start small, just targeting high schools right around our center in town, and basically was told after I shared curriculum probably shared too much information, the high schools said that they would do it themselves and would not need the independent living centers.

Fast forwarding to now, I'm seeing more and more need for this service. I'm glad to see that the world is saying that there is funding going to be supporting it.

My question for Jim and the fellow from Missoula, sorry, I forgot your name. After you have trained your staff and you are braced to provide services, what's the best or most successful way to truly market it so you do get the folks coming to your place? That seems to be a real issue, if you could share some of your experience, that would be great.

Thank you.

>> PARTICIPANT: Cool. Am I still unmuted?

All right. So thank you for the question. And you're right, that is, you know, from the beginning of our youth program, we did struggle with, you know, how do we get young people specifically involved in our center and wanting to come into our center and for a lot of years, it was, you know, a recognition by us and saying, let's meet them where they are. So, you know, they are not finding our center and we are not getting them in for any trainings that we offer. Let's go to them. Like you said, I think it's a great start to get into the schools.

And, really, with the feedback that we have heard from teachers, is what separated us from a lot of different programming geared towards young people with disabilities. The only thing we were asking from the schools is time for them to come in. We were not asking them to pay for a curriculum or take the trained staff to do it, you know which a lot of curriculum comes across their desk and they are like, yeah, this is great. But, you know, I'm working until 10:00 every night anyway. When will I have an opportunity to learn this stuff well enough to teach it?

So that became, you know, a real incentive for schools to bring us in. I would be curious, you know, after I'm done, you know, if you have any feedback with how it's going with that school since they decided to go it on their own. If it's going well, that's great. That just means that you can go to another school and try to replicate that model.

But, you know, maybe they are recognizing, hey, you know, there is something that you can offer us, that our teachers and curriculum are lacking, and very often, you know, that is the peer support. It's someone familiar with disability, in the history and the culture, well enough to be able to go in there as a peer as opposed to a teacher or an authority figure. So I would be curious to find out how that's going for the school.

But really meeting students at the school level and then getting the one or two teachers to champion, you know, and talk amongst their community. And it was ‑‑ after that, you know, I will keep my answer kind of short, it was probably two or three years after we started getting graduates through our program in the school that they came to us with a desire to do more. So they graduated and said, yes, we loved when you came in with your program to our classroom, but now I'm out of school. What can I do now?

And then at that point, we started developing programming at the center, and that addressed the need of young adults in the community, and, you know, that was another instance where we had to look at what we do and what was being asked of us. So as a center, we try ‑‑ you know, when I was brought on, you know, I was given the impression that social, you know ‑‑ we are not a social outlet. That's more in the realm of a Special Olympics or other programs. We are advocacy and independence. So we don't do that. But overwhelmingly, and I think I have heard this from centers across the country, young people that are graduating, that's the very thing that they are coming in and recognizing as a barrier. So, you know, we sat back down and said, all right. We are a movement that was born of young people's needs in the community. You know, do we need to shift a little bit to respond to that change?

So over the process of the years, you know, it's been ten years, over ten years that we have been doing these programs, we have slowly gotten, you know, to find that balance between, yes, we can ‑‑ we are a social outlet, but we are ‑‑ we approach it from an independent living point of view. So we are a place you can come, but we are always going to push you out of your boundaries and your comfort zone. So we'll all go bowling, but we're ‑‑ you know, say if you want to do this I encourage you, this is how you do it. This is how you advocate for yourself in social situations.

It's a lot of trial and error, but that's the approach we took.

>> MARY OLSON: So just to kind of sum that up, and then we'll try for Jim again. So I think that to answer your question, caller, what Mike is saying, that Summit did was, one, they found for marketing, they found a niche in the community that only they could fill. And so what I would say is going back to that school that you are talking about, and letting them know that stuff like what summit did was self‑determination research shows that one of the three important components of self‑determination in students includes working with a peer. So having a peer role model, and that's a niche that you then can offer, unless that teacher has a disability, that's something that you offer the community, and you market yourself as ‑‑ that sets you apart.

Then from there, they offered the service for free to show them the benefits, but then later on they started charging and were getting paid through different outlets such as voc rehab for supplying those necessary transition skills.

Did I sum that up right?

>> PARTICIPANT: That was beautiful. Thank you for doing that.

>> PARTICIPANT: Yes, thank you very much for that information. And to go back to the school that was approached, I'm talking about when there were changes to IDEA years ago. I think there was a movement to have the teachers provide the IL piece. As you say, they are not peers. Many are not folks with disables that really, true highly educated understand the student in that capacity. So from what I heard, it just didn't work. And what's happening now is there just is not the IL services being provided to the high schools.

So I appreciate what you have said. I think maybe it's time to go back to them and find it and tell them exactly what you have said, that this needs to be the peer component. I think that's key.

And just another question, while I have you, and maybe others have similar experiences with youth leadership forum. It's a wonderful program and excellent curriculum. We have offered it in our state for about 12 years. I'm calling from Rhode Island. And it's been very successful. We are thinking now of trying to expand it, have more staff involved and I'm just curious, if I could, if anyone has had experience and taking youth leadership right under the CIL umbrella.

>> PARTICIPANT: This is Mike again. And if anybody else has experience, that's, you know, a topic I would love to hear more about from other states.

I know in Montana, we have ‑‑ we are going on almost 15 years, and it's probably six years ago we transitioned from the university ‑‑ being under a university, in town, into the state, to having the funding going through a center. And that's when we went through and got a ‑‑ we had a bill pass through our state legislature that allocated the budget for our youth leadership forum in the governor's budget. So it's written in every year, but that money ‑‑ that money goes to a grant ‑‑ or goes through a center. So north central Independent Living Center in Montana actually receives the money through state which is then allocated to youth leadership forum.

So the youth leadership forum is its own 501(c)(3), but it is housed through one of our existing IL centers. And it's been a great relationship, and just, you know, yes and that. You know, that really is, when you are talking about building any kind of programming, but specifically youth career center, is we all, you know, identifying that magic and that feeling that comes from being around our community, and recognizing we can't always be here but isn't it nice to go to a conference or be on a call like this or for a young person, they are introduced to it at YLF, but that's only once a year.

When they need it, when they need to be around community where do they access to it? I think that where IL centers are set up really nice to be that place, you know, where a young person can go through a YLF or an APRIL conference and get that magic and get that feeling, but then understand that when you go back home to your community, that a place like that exists through your IL center, that they can go and tap into that, you know when they need to, when it's a class or a service or, you know, just that sense of community. So, again, I think ‑‑ you know, I think you can identify a need and ‑‑ and a population through your YLF of, you know ‑‑ of a service that you can offer.

>> MARY OLSON: And I just wanted to add in there, caller, as a resource, we are always trying to go supply some resources. The association of youth leadership forums or the AYLFs has a conglomerate of many youth leadership forums that work together, and you could reach out to them as well, and learn from some of their experiences as what that would look like.

Unless there's somebody else on the line who would like to add many something about youth leadership forum or if you would like to talk about a microbusiness that you are working on in your center or if you are Jim Whalen and you are on the line ‑‑

>> JIM WHALEN: I am on the line.

>> MARY OLSON: Yay!

>> JIM WHALEN: I am on the line and now that people have opened up this to many interesting topics, I want to comment on a couple. One is people are calling me from all parts of country wondering where I'm at. So that's cool.

Anyway, I will say in addition to the peer support that you can offer, one of the marketing points in our program in terms of youth transition is ‑‑ and this has happened both here in Michigan and in North Carolina where we did pretty much follow the same microbusiness model, was that you can go to a school and say, yeah, but what happens when that student graduates? Who follows up on them? Who follows up with them? And that's a place where centers for independent living can take a case ‑‑ you know, can take a case service record, a CSR, open it when a person is in school and guarantee that they will be followed forward. Transition doesn't stop with the piece of paper that you get when high school is done. And the teachers know that and the parents know that. And quite frankly ‑‑ and it's a great marketing point of view.

The other thing and I do want comment on the YLF situation, because we are trying to get one restarted in Michigan. I think if your YLF can start an alumni association or you can ask the delegates to have a two‑year commitment, one of which is back with your CILs or your, you know, other organizations who do advocacy in your state, so you can ask for that obligation up front, you build that network of, you know, peer advocates.

Now, in terms of ‑‑ just in terms of those people who are more interested in money than not, ask yourself how much money you save or you earn by having a ready made group of advocates or peers to plug in as staff.

For instance, you know we have run our schools program here in Michigan once semester. We run some summer youth stuff one semester and we already have two, perhaps three people, who will work for gas money for the next summer youth leadership training thing. Okay? That saves us a lot of staff money, at least some staff money if we ‑‑ if we choose. Or it allows us to expand our programs far more quickly. That's ‑‑ that's money. That's money we can use quite wisely, and it's also staffed training.

If you look at what it costs to train a staff person in today's dollars, regardless of salary, you know, you are talking tens of thousands of dollars to train a staff person if they can get the jump start in a school program, you know, that would be great.

I will ask this, how many centers have an eight to ten week training program a couple hours a week on those basic IL tenants? How many centers have time to do that with all of their employees? Probably not many. So look at what you are really doing by offering something that's needed in the community.

So, you know, I will just put one more plug in for YLF. You know, whatever you can do at this point to get your voc rehab people connected, to make it a long‑term thing, a contract with the CIL, to keep the philosophy strong and to make it a part of the new WIOA connection, in terms of transition, that leadership part, that participation part, now would be a good time. I mean, hammer it hard if you can. I think ‑‑ I think what Mike was talking about in terms of Montana as being a 501(c)(3) housed within a Center for Independent Living, is really an ideal combination in terms of making sure that the youth leadership forum stays the really kind of cool event that it is. So I will just start with that.

Go ahead, I heard some other noise. I hope it wasn't me again.

>> PARTICIPANT: Hi, this is Joel. I'm with Summit independent living center out of Missoula. You know, one of the things that we look at, as Mike was explaining, our new youth transitions and employment area that we are going into is, you know, how do we use our relationships with the business people that we know in the community to be able to create?

And one of the areas that we are looking at is job shadowing opportunities for that job experience. And, you know, our voc rehab here in Montana has already set contracts with a couple of our ‑‑ with a couple of our CILs that they will pay between $200 and $250 for a half day job shadow experience. Well, you know, many of us do that anyhow and so we have done that in the past without being compensated, you know, that's ‑‑ we talk about microbusinesses, that's a way of being able to take something that we already do, we already know and being able to open it up and use our relationship with the high schools that we have and the good relationships we have with voc rehab to create that fee for service that, you know, allows us then to take that money and reinvigorate other programs, create new opportunities and how do we help prepare these young people for that life after high school. So that's just an example of what we are looking with the microbusiness and looking at something that we already do very, very well.

>> MARY OLSON: Thanks. I wanted to offer another opportunity for those in the chat room, if you wanted to type out a question or an example of something that your center has been working on, and for those on the phone, if you can push star two, it will raise your hand and we can get to you.

I will let you know I have other things, Jim, if you want to continue.

>> JIM WHALEN: Okay. That's cool. Again, you know, I brought up youth programming as an example, because of the sort of almost endless market possibilities there and the barriers that youth face in terms of participation. And so, again, it's driven by a need ‑‑ a need created by a barrier and there are a ton of different facets so you can in essence experiment in ‑‑ in these sort of little bits of things that you can get paid for while doing things that you already want to do.

Now, I want to ‑‑ because I ‑‑ I know we are sort of moving ahead in time and I want to talk about just quickly some process ideas and then I want to get to the improv specifics and ‑‑ and talk about those, because I think one of our biggest problems as Centers for Independent Living and I will say problems versus challenges, is that we have a lot of sort of blockage in thinking. But I want to talk about the other concept that we have with regard to microbusiness or program development for money in your community and that's how ‑‑ how to make sure that you have a ‑‑ I guess what I'm calling a microbusiness engine idea. And so you have to have a ‑‑ you have to have a notion about how you work this in the community. So you have to have this idea about how you look at these microbusinesses or microenterprises or microprojects in some sort of scientific way, some sort of reasonably scientific ways because if you keep launching experiments that fail, obviously, there's something wrong with your process.

So I use something that is akin to ‑‑ and if you want to look this up, this ‑‑ it will sound so much more scientific than what I will talk about, but since I said this is duct tape, I will go with the duct tape explanation in just a second. If you look at collective impact models, you know, which is a big, long word, you will find out that you look at your community. You find organizations that have common sort of needs or agendas. You connect with them. You gather data. You find common ways of, you know, measuring what you are going to do and you become sort of a problem solving or market solution engine that works over time, based on common goals. And that sounds really cool and it's a long model and you can look up, you know, articles on the web and that's what I would do if you need to present it to somebody in the outside world.

But in CIL land, I call it the ECT model. The reason I call it the ECT model is because every one of these words ends in e‑c‑t. Okay?

And it's ‑‑ these four words are select, connect, infect, and collect. Okay? So what does that mean? If you are starting a microbusiness and you see it, you have been ‑‑ you have been inundated with the consumers who tell you this is a barrier, okay, then you select to address that barrier. So you select as a center, along with your consumers, along with your board that area, okay?

Then you ‑‑ you know, you have done that. That's the easy part. Then you connect with any variety of partners that might be helpers to solving that. Okay? And this sort of leads into the improv thing because in connecting with those partners, you accept any offer, right? You accept any offer that has a common goal selected. Will they be the greatest partners in the end? Maybe. Maybe not. But at the beginning ‑‑ at the beginning you connect with any partner you may think is necessary. Okay?

From that point forward, you do what I call is the infect. The infect told me, you sort of educate those partners, those people in terms of how this is done the IL way. Right? How is this done with the consumer controlled notion. How is this done in ways that it's done for everyone, not just a certain group of folks? How do you infect people, in fact, to have this nothing about us without us philosophy as partners. How do you infect?

So once you have selected a goal and connected with a bunch of partners who seem interested in doing this, then you infect them with the ‑‑ because you can preach to the choir all day long, but if it's not somebody who has similar goals, for if they can't help you reach where you are going to go, why take your time, quite frankly, why sit around and say, gee, you are good looking and have them say, gee, you're good looking back. Although, that's kind of cool sometimes, and that's easy for somebody would is blind to say. It is one of those things where how much are you gaining? How much are you addressing the barrier if that's what you do?

So you've got select, connect, infect and then look at the collect. Right? If you look at the collect first, again, you are going to enter into a lot relationships where there's going to be ‑‑ where there's going to be barricades thrown up in your way, the ECT team, select, connect, infect, and collect. The reason I picked those four is that any one of those things then can be put into a four by four chart and, you know, you can look at your goal. You can look back at who you can connected with. You can look at how well you infected them with IL sort of concept and you can look at what the collect is and you can see where those things either work or they fall apart. Okay?

And the transition model, for instance, you know, say you selected the goal. You know, you connected with the schools, and you infected the schools, but at the end, you wanted the transition to happen and you didn't connect with employers. Right? So you didn't get to that last piece. So the collect wasn't available. All right? So you can take that grid and you can tear it apart and put it back together and see how your community activities work. Right? How your community activities work. You can study them in sort of that, you know, sort of semiscientific way and you can also look at your resources, what are you spending on these things? You know, how much time are you spending on selecting goals? You know, and how much time are you spending on connecting with partners? How much time are you spending once you have those partners to really infect them with the ideas necessary to succeed in an IL sort of way and then quite frankly, you know, how much are you asking for something that's of value in return?

And something in value in return, quite frankly, we often think in terms of money, but it could be in terms of, you know, participation in a community event. It could be all kinds of things that your center needs to succeed. It could be all kinds of things that remove barriers. And so just to think in terms of that sort of ‑‑ sort of ‑‑ that sort of taxonomy, that ECT real highly educated helps me and it's helped me look at different programs, but especial highly educated the microprograms, the small things that you start. You really do get a sense of how these projects work or worked or why they didn't work, and that's helpful. It's not just ‑‑ it's not just a lemonade stand, you know? And I guess if I go back to the lemonade stand metaphor, you know, you can have the best lemonade in the world but if you did it on a rainy day, you know, it's not going to work unless you had something to put in the lemonade.

And so it's that kind of mentality where you can systemically look at even experiments and so that's what I ‑‑ that's sort of where I go with that idea. But ‑‑ so that's the ECT formula. It's kind of expanded in something called a collective impact model, and you can search that on the web and get all the particulars and I would encourage you to do that but the ECT thing works for me.

Anyway, in our last little bit, I really would like to take some time and talk about some of the sort of ideas that have helped me expand the thinking processes behind the microbusiness and basically I have tried to get several people on a couple of different staffs to think more creatively.

The difficulty was people tend to think in the same ways, even if you say ‑‑ even if you say, okay, think outside the box. In fact, that's a horrible thing, and I wish we could eliminate it completely, because I don't know that we even need a box. And so I have a problem with that.

So I started looking for ‑‑ I started looking for, over time, what are some ways to get people to sort of just ‑‑ in no ‑‑ no clearer terms, for ways to abandon their typical thought patterns and that's where the ideas of improv come in.

Because the rules of improv sort of help you to dismiss ‑‑ help you to dismiss the things that create barriers and I know you have all been in meeting whereas someone has a great idea, but their first response is, yep, but ‑‑ the yeah but kind of response. And it only takes one of those and the people who seek power in organizations, they tend to wait until last, right? They tend to wait until the idea gets around the room and then they stop it somewhere and say, you know, that's great, however ‑‑ or, you know, that's cool, but we tried that before. Right? They have all of these sort of yes but sort of things involved.

So the first principle ‑‑ well, I talked about one before, but the first principle is you really have to work hard at getting people to think, yes and. You know, even if what ‑‑ even if what they want to say is 180 degrees from what is being suggested, you want them to say yes, and, and open that up. Yes, and, so far I know we have an improv expert on the line Mr. Beers. What do you want to put yes and to that, Mike?

>> PARTICIPANT: Yes, and I'm loving the information that you are putting out there to us. Yeah and is the cornerstone of improv. So two things that improv teach right away are no negative ‑‑ you know, take negativity off the board and, you know, you have to build on to a story. So if you are an actor on stage and, you know ‑‑ so, Jim, let's give them an example of what you don't do.

Hey, Jim, it's really nice outside today.

>> JIM WHALEN: Yes, but it will probably rain today and I'm pretty sure of that.

>> PARTICIPANT: Yes, so what Jim did was he took what I said and he built on to it. Had Jim said, no, it's not, I have nowhere to go from there. There's nothing to jump to.

>> JIM WHALEN: Yes. If I would said, no, it's not. Then where does Mike go, you know?

>> PARTICIPANT: Yeah.

>> JIM WHALEN: For if I answer his question with a question, he can go somewhere with it. But if I keep asking questions, it becomes like the 2‑year‑old thing like why? Like if I would say, with need to have two more staff people to look at nursing home transition, and we don't at our center but we could have a board member who constantly, no matter what the topic is, is why? Why do we need to do that? They may want to know why, but if their constant technique is why, it's a blocking technique, versus, yes, and, we also need to look at this. Or yes, and...

So one the things that I find in terms of program creation is to follow this yes, and rule. It also helps in just your ordinary meeting situations. It helps free up communications. The ideas are generated far more rapidly than one might do in just sitting up and saying, okay, everybody throw ideas out there, right? The accepting every offer type of thing. If you are going to develop programs for your community, you really do have to do that. You really do have to do that notion of, yes, and.

I would encourage you to try it at your next staff meeting our your next program meeting with just a little topic, like you know, what are some activities you would like to at your annual dinner? We tried that and we determined that we wanted more prizes ‑‑ or prize tickets for less money. You know, not three big prizes, but more winnings could happen that way. We determined that we should try to find did not all of our beverages being sponsored, at east some and having that as part of our corporate sponsorship. We decided we should start earlier. All of these things were brought up in a positive way versus, you know what we did wrong last time? Because if you start out with what we did wrong ‑‑ what did we do wrong last time, then what happens? Then people think in terms of, well, whose fault was that? Right?

And, of course, there are reasons things don't work and there are people whose fault it is, but how much ‑‑ how much positive energy and how many resources do you generate by identifying, quite frankly, what went wrong in a situation that you no longer can go back and change. You can't do that very often. So what I want to ‑‑ what I want to try ‑‑ what I want to try is I'm going to try one thing and I want three of you people on the line to follow. This is an experiment with the technology. Mary, and I should have warned you of this before, however, I did not. So I'm going to start by giving a prompt, and see if three ‑‑ only three people can yes and this to something that might be helpful. Okay?

We'll see if it works. Maybe three or four. If you get excited, press star two. Okay.

I had this great idea about a small program I wanted to start related to transportation and... who wants to pick it up? Related to transportation and?

>> PARTICIPANT: Yes, and I work with a lot of young people who struggle getting to and from employment opportunities.

>> PARTICIPANT: Hi, yes, and, I think it's a fabulous idea if we came up with some kind of fee structure we could offer to people to circumvent the costs of transportation.

>> JIM WHALEN: You see, now I'm going to have to do this because it really ‑‑ it really points out to one of the values. I will encourage people to look up this improv thing and try it, because one of the biggest things is we get on these calls and we expect people to provide solutions to this, where if the improv technique will just let them flow forward, and that's what I think is cool. And so I will piggyback on Mike's piggyback. Yes, and since ‑‑ since a lot of people need transportation, a possible solution is transportation that will allow several people to ride on a flexible ‑‑ on a flexible schedule versus one schedule.

>> MARY OLSON: Great, Jim. You are hearing feedback because I unmuted somebody else, a couple of other folks who had their hands raised.

>> JIM WHALEN: Go for it.

>> MARY OLSON: I just unmuted you, 620 number. I'm going to mute and unmute them again. All right.

Go ahead.

>> JIM WHALEN: Try muting them.

>> MARY OLSON: Go for it.

>> JIM WHALEN: Try muting them again and see if ‑‑

>> PARTICIPANT: Hello.

>> MARY OLSON: I have their hands raised ‑‑

>> JIM WHALEN: This we go. I heard someone.

>> It was muted on my end, Mary, as well as on your end.

What if that opportunity in addition to employment could include recreational activities? How could those recreational activities reach into the community beyond just people with disabilities?

>> JIM WHALEN: Okay go.

>> MARY OLSON: I know we are coming closer to an end here. Did you have anything else to add.

>> PARTICIPANT: You mentioned microbusiness is quite a bit of discussion here. The organization I work with, we recognized a significant expense we had in web development for the organization itself. So instead of continuing to pay someone to do that web development for us, we dedicated some staff to begin learning that web development. And once the staff had learned the web development and realized how they did it, they did the web development for the company, which was a cost savings. Once that cost savings was in mace and going, we said what if we do this for the community at large. We began to do this with various community partners. And it went a step further and we began to teach individuals who wanted to learn how to do web development. And so that has grown exponentially.

So we have a program within the company that does ‑‑ or within the CIL that does generate some income, but we have also put ‑‑ by putting an iPad in someone's hand, that they earn through some kind of drawing program, they have a drawing based on their ‑‑ you know, some activity that was done, and they earned an iPad. Then they were given an opportunity to learn the skills of how to operate, that which could include web development and or things. So your skill level goes from a single person in your CIL to the individuals in the home actually having a potential to learn a business themselves.

>> MARY OLSON: Cool. Thank you. That's a great example.

>> JIM WHALEN: Yes, that's a beautiful example. In fact, that's ‑‑ that's a perfect example of how one looked at ‑‑ you know, one looked at a barrier. And that barrier was our individuals in our community can't even get information about us in a very good way.

>> PARTICIPANT: Right.

>> JIM WHALEN: So then it moved on to, you know, how do we remove that barrier and then what that center did was did the yes and. They turned it around and said, yes and, you know, here's also what we can do with this in the community and someone else must be on too, Mary. Or it's just my phone.

>> MARY OLSON: No, I'm hearing the feedback too.

>> PARTICIPANT: I'm going to mute my line here.

>> MARY OLSON: Oh, go for it.

>> PARTICIPANT: I was done and good. I'm good.

>> MARY OLSON: Oh, all right. Thank you. Great. Well, I can hardly believe it that we are already up on the time. So I just wanted to give one last opportunity for folks, if anybody has a question, that they would like to add or add into the conversation, press star two to raise your hand and if not, I will get you give some closing remarks, Jim. Thanks, again, everybody, for joining us today. Jim?

>> JIM WHALEN: Okay. Yeah, what I'm going to say is, um, pretty much one, just in terms of encouragement. The people who are on this call probably need this less than some of the other people in your centers. One of the reasons that I called this, you know, the duct tape of disability, sometimes we as centers have a hard time answering the question what it is ‑‑ what it is that we are. And really, if we start looking at set programs as our identity, we miss a lot of opportunities in the community to ‑‑ to get rid of barriers. You know, if we are seen as primarily a home health care agency or primarily a transportation provider, we miss a lot of opportunities. So that's one reason why you need to be looked at as duct tape.

The second one is this whole IL thing started from people who were willing to be creative where they were, with what they had, and I would just encourage everyone to do that.

I am more than happy to talk with anybody about these topics or all kinds of things and share everything. And I guess maybe that's what I wanted to end with. Share everything openly and moving it forward. You never know who else can use your hammer as a screwdriver.

>> MARY OLSON: Great. Thanks again. And just one last item, if you want to check out our website at APRIL ‑‑ at the APRIL website, you can catch this and other conversations that have been archived, if you want to hook back later on.

An Jim, what is the best way that people can reach you if they wanted to continue the conversation?

>> JIM WHALEN: Well, obviously not by phone. Anyway ‑‑ no. Email Jim.Whalen@bwcil.org would be the easiest or they can call, and I'm going to give you two numbers. One is this number that I'm calling from, which is 810‑987‑9337. And I can also offer my cell, which is one of the best ways to get ahold of me, which is 810‑990‑5863.

>> MARY OLSON: Great. Thank you again for agreeing to join us on this topic. For those of you who don't know, we do try to do topics every month. If you would like to submit a topic, email me at Mary.Olson@mso.umt.edu. We are always looking for speakers to share their information.

And our next topic will be ‑‑ well, we will be skipping July because it's the summer month of fun and you can join us again in August for a conversation on working with mental health consumers in your CIL. So thanks again. And we'll talk again soon.

(End of session)