

APRIL
YOUTH TRANSITION: BACK TO THE FUTURE
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>> KATHY HATCH: So this is great. I'm just glad to hear that there're so many folks here. And this is Kathy Hatch. I'm with APRIL, and I would like to welcome everybody today. Today's call is hosted by APRIL, but it's sponsored by the ILnet, and that's ILRU. We are happy you were able join us and we are looking forward to a lively discussion. We have an hour and a half. We will start out with an introduction of our speakers and the topic is the "Four Core Services with a Twist." I hope that's going to be an interesting topic today.

I would like to change the format just a little bit today. Usually we have everybody speak and then have questions, but today the speakers are going to have times during their presentations where they are going to ask if there are any questions. So if that happens, we'll just try to be careful with everybody and -- and, you know, try not to talk over each other, I guess. But do feel free to ask your questions.

And a little bit of housekeeping before we start. The first thing I would like to say is we are using CART and I see that many of you folks are already on the line and that's wonderful.

If you are not and would you like to follow along, you go to the APRIL web site, which is www.APRIL-rural.org and you will see today's IL conversation on the front page. And you notice there is a link there, a URL that is to CART. You can also send questions via the chat line on there if you would like to.

So next then I would like to ask everybody to please put your phones on mute using star six. Now, if you want to come -- (Beeping).

Everybody is doing it.

>>MIKE BEERS>> This is like pong.

>> KATHY HATCH: It is. It does sound like Pong. Okay. Since this is a bridge line, it's sensitive to any background noise and it will even pick up, you know, paper shuffling

and things like that. So, thanks, everybody, for using star six. If you want ask a question, use star six again to toggle off mute. So just star six again when you want to come off mute. I may have to remind folks sometimes during the call because folks come on and it -- it's obvious that somebody is not on mute.

Anyway, the reason we do this is because cell phones and speaker phones can really cause a lot of distortion on the line. So if you are using either one of those we would like you to get to a land line if at all possible and mute your phone when you are not speaking.

Once again the Q&A parts, we will try to moderate those parts.

If you could be courteous and don't talk over top of each other, that would be great.

Okay. Now I would like to welcome our presenters today and I will begin by telling you a little bit about each one of them. We have Michael Beers, Mary Olson, and Sierra Royster. And Michael is currently the transitions coordinator at Summit Independent Living Center in Missoula, Montana. He's been a delegate and staff at the Montana YLF since 2001 and was appointed to the president's task force on employment of adults with disabilities youth advisory council. He's the former president of alliance for disabilities and students of the University of Montana, a student disability rights group and is on the APRIL board. He co-leads BALLS, which is Building Advocacy and Learning Leadership Skills transition curriculum taught by youth with disabilities for youth with disabilities and YODA. Youth Opening Doors through Advocacy. A social and advocacy group age 13 to 30th. He's been an active member of the APRIL Youth Steering Committee and has been a real key player in the development of the youth peer mentoring program through APRIL.

Mary Olson also works for Summit Independent Living Center as the peer advocacy coordinator and her job includes working with youth with disabilities throughout northwestern Montana in BALLS and YODA as well with Mike and other colleagues at Summit. She does presentations on disabilities, culture and law. Mary serves on two youth committees. One statewide, working on getting youth with disabilities to learn from each other and practice their advocacy skills and one for APRIL, in developing a youth peer mentoring model.

Prior to coming to Summit, she was a Montana Youth Leadership Forum staff member. She's interested in sharing information with other young people and getting them involved in the disability movement.

Now, Sierra Royster is a certified and licensed recreational therapist. She graduated from Mount Olive College with a degree in recreation and leisure studies with a concentration in recreational therapy in 2008. She began her work for the Raleigh Parks and Recreation agency moving to the North Carolina state hospital, where she was a physical education leader and therapeutic recreation specialist treating substance

abuse and behavioral health. She currently works as a youth advocate at the Alliance of Disability Advocates Center for Independent Living in Raleigh. She has a disability youth group through the center with young adults, ages 15 to 29. She's also the coordinator of the North Carolina youth leadership forum, and is one of the leaders of TAIL which is Teaming for Advocacy Through Independent Living, a program that uses combined tools for educating youth with advocacy and their rights as a young person with a disability. Sierra currently serves on the North Carolina SILC and is a newly elected APRIL board member. She just filled our second youth board member position.

So, again, they are here today to talk about Youth Transition: Back to the Future, the Four Core Services with a Twist. So now I would like to turn it over to Mike Beers. Mike?

>> MICHAEL BEERS: All right, thank you, Kathy. Wow, we sound like we really know what we are talking about.

>> KATHY HATCH: Sound good, don't you?

>> MICHAEL BEERS: I want to remind everybody on the call that this is an IL Conversation. So hopefully if you don't have coffee in front of you, or a beverage, go and fill your glass right now because we are just going to sit back and have a conversation about young people. So we have a list of topics we want to cover today, but more importantly, we want to make sure that any question or comment or strategy that you have or have used in your center -- (Music, Music, Music...).

Intermission while phone lines were reestablished after a participant put us on hold and caused Muzac on the line.

>> KATHY HATCH: Okay. I would say let's go ahead and get going. Yeah, let's go ahead and start the chat again.

>> MICHAEL BEERS: All right. Well, welcome back, everybody. The short commercial break brought to you by bridge line.

Anyways, what I was talking about before Mozart interrupted, the reason we're calling this "Back to the Future" in developing our own youth programs which Kathy mentioned, in detail later on at the end, there are programs like BALLS and TAILs and APRIL, back in history to say, you know what, in order to -- this question of how do you get young people involved is not really new because independent living was started by young people.

>> KATHY HATCH: Hey, Mike. I'm sorry to interrupt you again, but are you on a speaker phone again? Or -- or not, a regular line? I don't know about everybody else, but I'm missing again about every third or fourth word.

>> Yeah, he's cutting out.

>> So am I.

>> KATHY HATCH: Mike?

>> There's a lot of feedback here too.

>> KATHY HATCH: I think what you will have to do is use a regular land line. Okay? And go off speaker phone.

>> MICHAEL BEERS: I don't think it's the speaker phone. I think it's other people not on mute.

>> I think so too.

>> KATHY HATCH: That could be it. Everybody try the star six again now. Please, nobody use -- nobody use their hold button. Okay. I apologize to everybody. This is crazy.

>> MICHAEL BEERS: You think you plan for everything, and something comes up. So how -- not to be cliché, but can you hear me now?

(Laughter)

>> KATHY HATCH: So far.

>> MICHAEL BEERS: All righty. All right. Third time is the charm. The reason we call this "Back to the Future" is in developing our open youth programs from BALLS to TAIL to APRIL's involvement with youth, we really have looked to the past, because one thing Mary and Sierra and I all have in common is that we are nerds when it comes to IL history and just hearing the stories of how independent living came into being and the philosophy of, you know, who better to guide us to our futures than each other. It was Ed Roberts who said I think had the best independent living philosophy, you know, definition I have ever heard. I've heard people talk for an hour and a half on the details but I heard an interview with Ed Roberts where he says independent living is a fundamental idea that everyone has a future. And with that means for you, it's going to differ from individual to individual. There's not a person alive, disability or not, that doesn't have a future, and that's what our philosophy is.

And we're really going back in time, because independent living was started by young people. So we're just now getting to a point where we need to refocus that and say what are some of the things we did at the beginning? And, you know, how do we start that conversation that the Rolling Quads had so many years ago, because they were young. They were going to college, and they didn't have -- even before this idea of

independent living grew into what we are today, it was started because young people were looking for transportation. They were looking for education. They were looking for employment. They were looking for ways to get socially around town, housing, and these are all the questions that young people still face today.

You know, my favorite Ed Roberts Rolling Quad story is just the advent of curb cuts being good for anybody. It's an old story for a lot of people, but if you don't know, Ed went to the University of Berkeley and he was one of the first quote/unquote, severely disabled students to attend that university and it caught a lot of people's eyes. He set an example. So other people who used wheelchairs and had disabilities started to enroll in at Berkeley and, of course, in the 1960s, you didn't have accessible dorm rooms. So they all stayed in the college infirmary -- the university's hospital -- and they did what any young person does when they get together with their peers. They began to talk. And they started to say, "you know what, I can't get to this class. This building my class is in is on the second floor. What can we do to make this campus more accessible?"

Long story short, as they began to graduate, they realized they needed to take this idea and use the example they set on campus and spread that out to the community. And now we need jobs. We need housing. We need all of those things. And, you know, there weren't curb cuts -- you know, when I got involved with independent living, curb cuts are one of those things that I always assumed were just always there. You know, from the beginning of time sidewalks had curb cuts. But it wasn't true. It's a relatively new thing. So the Rolling Quads made a decision that any time a sidewalk breaks, we will get them to put a curb cut there. Well, sidewalks are made of concrete, and they don't break very often.

So they went on what they called "night ops" and, you know, they took pitch forks and hammers and, they gathered people at night and said, you know what, in a couple of weeks, I want to get to this place. So they went out and they broke the curbs. So when the city of Berkeley woke up, they said, oh, shoot, how did this happen? I guess we need to put in curb cuts. Those are the barriers that they faced. And, you know, but we're a little different. It's different now. It's the same story. We are trying to access as young people the same things, and because of Ed and everybody on this phone call which is another thing. We are so young as a movement that a lot of the people that got us those rights and started this conversation are on this call today. And that's another reason why we're really anxious for this to be a conversation.

So the issues are the same, but the barriers are different. A lot of the original barriers that IL faced, aren't there or are there to a lesser extent because of independent living and because of the ADA. You know, we don't have to go out at night and break curbs to go to the movies. We don't have to, take over a campus to get our representation, but we still face discrimination. You know, there's still attitudes. There's still financial things but so the barriers are changed. That's what we will talk about today.

This idea of getting young people involved, I started in -- Kathy mentioned, the

President's Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities Youth Advisory Council, which is the longest title I have ever been a part of, but that was back in the early 2000s, and this idea of bringing youth on board was really sexy, and there was a lot of funding, to get youth involved with our movement.

And what kept happening was you had creation of a youth advisory council. And APRIL, I think, give them credit, was the first to coin the phrase, "kids table." That's what you are doing when you have a youth advisory group. The adults will have a conversation and at the very end of it, they're going to, you know, make themselves look good. They will ask youth what they think.

That's a broad brush. We have some youth advisory councils that were very successful, but this idea of tokenism, and we're going to start getting youth involved on paper, and have them a part of the day-to-day activities of our center. That's a new thing -- to really listen to the young people.

At first, there was going to be a Youth Advisory Council to the APRIL board. So there were a handful of us, probably six or seven of us. And you know what, we were on 100 youth advisory councils for 100 different projects. We asked, "How about you just put us on our board? Have us sit at the same table, along with the other people that are guiding this organization?" And to APRIL's credit, they really embraced the idea and said, you know what, fantastic idea! And Mike, since you had that idea, why don't you go ahead and be the youth -- or the youth member of the board.

You know, to be honest, it scared me because, here I was, a peer advocate at the time with my center. I'm sitting at APRIL Board meetings with CIL directors who are much older and much more experienced than I am. So I was freaking out, and I really -- you know, Kathy and APRIL board members can attest, I didn't say a lot the first year which is something you are going to find, that, you know, a young person may be quiet for a while and take time to acclimate.

And what it really takes is an extra effort from everyone -- we want you -- we want your voice but we are going to mentor. We are going to model a little bit.

>> KATHY HATCH: Mike, we're losing you again.

>> Somebody is typing is -- somebody is typing right now on the speaker. We can hear it and it keeps cutting us out.

>> KATHY HATCH: That's what it sounds like to me too. I don't know where that's coming from. But whoever is typing, please don't if you can help it.

>> MICHAEL BEERS: I appreciate your taking notes. But, yeah, that first year or so, that I was on the APRIL Board was a learning process. And most young people are going to go through that. They are going to need that person to talk to them during

breaks and say it's OK. And, to remind people...because we all get really excited and we are all really passionate...but you need to have that person involved that's going to remind everybody that, hey, you know, the young person has something to say, or we haven't heard from them yet.

And, gradually, I got to a place where I didn't feel like I was just the youth representative on the APRIL Board. It was I am a member of this APRIL Board, and I'm going to bring my voice to it, which just so happened to be the young person's voice. And there's going to be ups and downs and we are going to talk about that with the core services. You are going to have a youth that you really want to be involved but they won't call you back. And you're going to have a youth get involved and, you know, really not do anything but kind of take up that seat, when that could go to someone else. And that's just the nature of the beast. So you have to know it's not always going to pan out. But one of the things that our center -- and I give our director credit for this -- has always just seen youth as a part of everything we do. So at every staff meeting we have it's on the agenda. In our planning, just like when you budget for all the core services, within those, you know, youth are a priority and how do we get youth, involved in that.

It's just become a mind-set. For every young person that goes out there and really gets involved and really, kick starts our efforts, we have, you know, through no fault of their own some youth that just don't. They are either not interested or they are so independent that they don't have time to be involved with the center. To their credit, that's is a success in its own right.

So with that, I know we are working with a shorter amount of time. We are going to open it up for discussion, if anybody has questions?

MARY >> Does anybody have any questions specifically about what Mike was talking about here, and then we'll get into some other areas. If your questions about maybe another service, we might end up hitting that. So any questions about board members or anything?

>> KATHY HATCH: Remember, if you have a question, use star six to come off mute for a second. Or you can send me a note through the chat room too if you are interested.

>> All right. Well, if there's not any questions at this time, we might move on --

>> Hi, this is Ann McDaniel. I have a question?

>> Yeah.

>> What is the best way to go about recruiting youth board members? Where do we find them?

>> MICHAEL BEERS: You set out little food traps.

>> ANN: Oh, what works the best!

>> MICHAEL BEERS: A trail of fruit snacks!

>> MICHAEL BEERS: Actually, we have a variety of different strategies but what worked for our center is really getting involved with the school and building that relationship. And one of the things we always tell people is, any relationship you have can work. Not just a special ed teacher or a gym teacher. It can be a custodian you know, somebody on staff -- a parent. They can be your best foot in the door at a school and then you find out what they do. Find out what they're looking for. We have a lot to offer you. We say, tell us what you need. You know, if you want a panel of individuals with disabilities to do awareness... if your school has a diversity week, or a respect club. Is the disability voice being heard or that perspective being taught in the classrooms. You can get in that way.

>> Another way that we have been successful is just going into history classes and talking about disability history and how it's a part of American history or the civil rights movement. And then you always end up having some of those students with disabilities in those classes who are intrigued.

And we're going to talk about a lot of our four core services but those youth groups and those independent living skills training classes, like BALLS and TAIL, you will be surprised that -- and Sierra, you know, chime in if you want. You would be surprised to see that we have students that go through the BALLS class in the high school, and it may not be a year later, it may not be two years later but eventually we see them trickling into our office again asking for other services and asking how to get involved.

And so sometimes it just takes them some time. They get the information and then it might take those one or two years to mature.

>> MICHAEL BEERS: Right.

>> MARY OLSON: And another thing that I wanted to just shout out is that young people are worried about a lot of same things that seasoned people are.

>> MICHAEL BEERS: Hmm.

>> MARY OLSON: We thought that getting them in the door was going to be by saying we are going to have free food. It's always a plus, but we found that they are actually worried about resume building and getting experience, volunteer experience and so we advertise that to them as well.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: This is Sierra. The thing that has really worked for us is going

to transition fairs or going to resource fairs in the public school system. Because the parents are there and usually the youth is kind of like drug along. So I typically skip over the parents and talk directly to the youth and that doesn't happen to them very often. So having that connection and letting them ask questions, letting them speak up and asking them, what do they want? What are they looking for? And then they kind of remember that and then following up with them. That's kind of worked for me to recruit a lot of the youth, like you asked. Mike the last thing I would add to that question is if your state has a Youth Leadership Forum, I would really partner with them and just kind of be there with a net after they graduate.

(Laughter)

>> MICHAEL BEERS: Because, you know, YLFs are all different, but a lot of times they are the first introduction a young person with a disability has to their community. This is their first connection with their peers with disabilities and role models with disabilities and they get so charged up during the week and so excited to advocate, but it's only a week long.

So, that's where centers can come in and that's a lot of where our programs came out of. The question was how do we reach the students that don't go to YLF and how can we continue that, once they get all charged up? How can we keep our doors opened so they have an outlet for that new found love of advocacy and our history and our community?

So, yeah, definitely reach out to your state YLFs or any state organization that works with and across disabilities.

>> MARY OLSON: And last but not least, I just wanted to -- and I know we all love independent living and it's all based upon that idea, "who is the best expert on their life?" They are, right? So youth actually like to participate in surveys. We go in and we ask our classes questions all the time. Or we'll just cold call teachers and say, could we come into your class and have 20 minutes of their time to do a survey to ask them what they want from us. The teachers are usually really open to it, because they want to know what the heck the students want too.

And students are just -- are just waiting for somebody to ask them. They have a lot to say. So maybe ask them how can we get you in our door.

>> MARY OLSON: Did that answer the question? Are we --

>> KATHY HATCH: Ann?

>> MARY OLSON: Any more questions on that topic before we move on?

>> Q from AUDIENCE: I have a quick question. How would you facilitate or engage the

school system to collaborate with the CIL and bring some of their students down to the centers maybe for some ILS classes.

>> MARY OLSON: That's a great question. -- Sierra, do you think we should transition into the four cores? Maybe we can start with IL skills training. Would that be okay with you?

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: I was going to say, we can probably fill in some of the blanks.

>> MARY OLSON: All right. So why don't we do that. We will move on to the next part. We will have another spot for questions, if we didn't answer the question, please let us know and we'll address it.

So at this time, we kind of wanted to talk a little bit more about how do you incorporate youth transition services into the four core services. As a quick reminder, Information and Referral, Peer Support, Independent Living Skills Training, and Self and Systems Advocacy are basically what we all think of as the four core and as we all know, there's a fifth coming down and that's transition services. And so what we kind of want to talk to you guys about is how at our centers we have really tried to be creative in incorporating that transition service throughout the other four core. And I just wanted to give a shout out to IL philosophy again that Mike talked about. A lot of our generation and the generations we're working with are what we call the ADA generation.

They may not be aware of what life was like before the ADA and so what we have noticed is that sometimes the IL philosophy will take a little bit more time than with somebody else. They really need you to help them to learn that responsibility piece. That's something that I feel strongly about and I think we have kind of talked about as a group, Sierra, Mike and I. Within our school systems and the way that we are set up is that students, a lot of times, don't really have that opportunity to be held accountable. And so we really try to model that. Making sure they are held to the same responsibility as everybody else.

You want a youth on your Board? The mere fact that they are a youth does not make them qualified. You still want somebody who is going to be a leader, somebody who is going to follow through, you know, and making sure that they are qualified in the other areas as well. So why don't we start with independent living skills training. One thing that we have done at Summit is that we found that our young people with disabilities, the high school aged ones, were not necessarily connecting with the independent living skills training classes that we were already offering. So, for example, programs like Living Well with a Disability, Working Well with a Disability, communication, assertiveness, they weren't necessarily connecting with them the way that we were teaching them in our CIL.

So our director decided early on that adds a whole other difficult level. If you are going to have teachers bringing those students into your CIL for these classes, we have to

make sure to get parent permission slips and all of that from their guardian. So what we decided was we would take the skills training to them. And that's the kind of creative part. We reached out to some teachers in the special ed departments and the vocational education classes -- they call them voc ed classes in Montana -- and we said, Can we bring this skills training to you?

We then combined all of that information into one basic skills training class that we call BALLS here, and Sierra is going to talk a little bit about TAIL. BALLS is -- Building Advocacy and Learning Leadership Skills for those who are wondering.

And then with those skills training class, how we made it "youthy." We added in a ton of activities. You can get the same point across, but make it fun. So, for example, when we are talking about a community like the disability community, we play a game called the string game. So everybody says something that they are passionate about, and then if you are passionate about it too, you raise your hand, and I'm going throw that string to you and we're going to go around until we have a big web and then we talk about how it doesn't matter if you have an invisible or visible disability. It doesn't matter if you are a girl or boy, we are all connected.

And so we get a point across, but in a different way.

>> MICHAEL BEERS: And the one thing I would add too, and we get this misconception a lot with centers, is that they all want to start a youth program but they don't have a young person to run it and to do the classes. Honestly, that really is a luxury, not a necessity. If you want young people in your center show the passion. I don't care if you are 85, you can show the passion. If you can show me that you are real and like Sierra said, you are going to follow through and have information that's relevant to my life and doing it in a way that I know that you are excited and passionate about, that's all I need.

I don't care if you are under 30 or not. You know, we've had this conversation among the three of us too, it wasn't necessarily young people that got us involved in the movement. It was -- we call them "seasoned" advocates at APRIL. You know, or with our center, it was, you know, hearing Billy play music or watching how passionate Kathy Hatch is, and just that work ethic.

Those are the really important things that got us involved, and got us excited. So don't think that you have to have that young person lined up. before you start engaging youth.

>> Right.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: And hopefully this part might address the question that you had. We took this to the school, and once they learned that the curriculum is different we have been bombarded by teachers who want it. The peer aspect of the person with a disability will have that conversation with you. So once we proved ourselves, the teachers then took it upon themselves to get the students to our centers. We now have

teachers who line up field trips and bring all the students to our center so that they can see where it is, hear what we do. It might just take that relationship building piece.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: In Raleigh, the teachers here have told me they don't have resources. They are supposed to be teaching about advocacy and independent living. The people with disabilities are not familiar with the independent living philosophy and they have to teach this to their students. It's the same idea as BALLS and ours is Teaming for Advocacy through Independent Living and its taking that IL skills class and training to the schools. How I did that was I contacted the teachers I went to school with.

Literally, one teacher had already retired and she said, I still know people there. So making any and every connection and then like Mary said, building that trust with them, showing them that we do know what we are talking about and this is how we connect to students. It's a little bit different, and I always talk about having that outside person come in because the students see the teachers every day. And occasionally, because they get a guest speaker and they are supposed to act really good for the guest speaker. Well, this is a class where we go in a couple of times and we now get to know the students and it's a whole different kind of relationship where they can open up. I know we've already talked about asking students about what they want and letting them have the conversation.

So I know that that really helps build that relationship, but it also ensured that they are getting those skills that we're there to teach.

>> MARY OLSON: And then to build upon that, in Montana, we take the skills training to them. And we have been doing that for a while in Missoula and so now we actually do have skills training in our center that we have built around those conversations that Sierra was talking about. So we do have a skills training class at our center called Empower Me. And what Empower Me is, it's basically we built it for -- in Montana, a lot of our students with developmental disabilities are on a really long waiting list. A lot of them are sitting at home waiting for services in order to go out and get a job. They are losing a lot of the really great skills and information that their teachers and us got to teach them in high school.

So they come to our center -- once they've graduated high school for the Empower Me class and that talks about safety as a young person with a disability. So you are living on your own now. You know, here're some safety tips. We bring in Steve and he talks to us about self-defense and how to keep safe. We also just talk about building relationships socially and even, some of those dating relationships. So you are older, you are out of school. You are done transitioning but there're still all of those skills that you might have questions about. And another class that we teach in our center is the Living Well with a Disability. We found once they graduated high school, they liked our BALLS class or the TAIL class and now they are starting to come into the Living Well and Working Well classes as young adults.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: And going off of what Mary said with the Empower Me class and how that relates to dating and all the other parts of life. That's one thing we saw from youth and actually, I identified that at the Youth Leadership Forum the first year. A lot of the youth had a lot of questions about dating.

We were just hearing that they were not learning the same things that the typical education classes were learning in health about relationships and sexuality and those kinds of things. So one of our independent living classes here is called a Healthy Relationships class and we talk about how people with disabilities sometimes get forgotten about in that subject. It's basically a one-on-one, everything you can think of on relationships and it's kind of based on the mind-set of what a typical high school student know about relationships? Everybody should know that, regardless of disability or no disability. So we kind of teach that and we go off of what they have learned and have heard from other people. We just kind of go from there but let the whole conversation go where they want. If they feel like they want to learn more about a certain area of dating relationships, we can talk about that too.

>> MARY OLSON: You are awesome. I was going to add one more thing about IL training. The last piece is just because I'm a real detail person so if you have questions about, well, how do I document that since you are talking about under aged people. It's up to each center's policies. I think everybody does it differently. We decided at our center for independent living, that the teachers able to give me those students' names, so I do information and referral for each student that goes through a BALLS class. So they get an I&R, because we do talk a lot about the resources they are going to use and we talk about, communication and goal setting, which is all real good information. Basically, that's how we document that, and then add the community event. So then when they come back into our center, after they've graduated, we open them as consumers.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: That's the same way we do it here in Raleigh.

>> MARY OLSON: All right maybe we should move on to information and referrals, Sierra?

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: Yeah. So I know we talked about how we give a lot of information out in the independent living classes -- or that we teach in the schools and in our centers. And basically, everybody has the same need for wanting information that is disability specific or things that can help them to be independent in the community. And one way that I have found is that our center sends out alerts. We have somebody on staff that keeps up with what's going on with the laws and the community, like a circus or a park opening, and those things are sent out. And they are sent out on a wide email list.

Well, a lot of the questions I was getting from parents and other youth were, well, what's going on in our area for youth? So I have kind of taken that and now we have a youth

email list. So since I have worked with a lot of different community organizations such as Parks and Rec, the Autism Society, the ARC, all of these different kinds of things and even a local theater group for youth, I just keep working and networking with all of those groups. I send out their information and my information, so if I have a class in the center or there's a law that's really going to affect the disability community, I will post that or send it out to my list. And that's just one way that we get information out.

I know Mary talked about the classrooms, telling them about their goals and telling them about communication and the resources that are out there for after they graduate and that's the same thing we do for our TAIL class. We have attempted -- attempted being the key word here -- to have a Resource Day and the idea behind that for the TAIL classes, was that one of our classes would actually take a field trip down to our center. That way they get to see our center but we have also lined up different organizations, like VR and housing and SSI SSDI, employment security commission to be there -- anybody and everybody who can assist them as they get out of high school. That's the thought behind it. We are still in the building processes on that. I know I talked about the Healthy Relationships class that we do here. At the end of that, we can't cover everything that is ever going to come up as a question with a relationship, but we do offer them a resource book when they leave. So that gives them the information that they may be too embarrassed to ask about or maybe they don't know they have something to ask until later on when they actually enter into a relationship.

This gives them the opportunity to go and be independent and find that resource.

I think that's a lot of what we do and as Mary said, with information & referral. Any time anybody is in our high schools and wants to be involved, I put them as an information & referral. It's a little different than what you do, Mary.

>> MARY OLSON: And along with that, along with what Sierra talked about, we also do information & referral in IEPs, the individualized education plan. So on that relationship building we talked about earlier, the teachers are now involved and the students. We let the students know that it is their right to have whoever will help them be the best advocate in their IEP meeting. So a lot of times the students and the teachers contact us to come into their IEP meetings as an I&R resource.

So when they are filling out the transition goal pieces, every IEP has to have a transitional goal in employment, independent living and (no audio), we can come in and talk about those resource pieces that the teachers and students might not be aware of and add them into their IEP for them.

>> MICHAEL BEERS: And I also wanted to touch on just getting information out there. One thing that we had to learn the hard way is that young people don't necessarily find conference calls as sexy as we do. And that they don't have a phone number even, it's not the best way to get hold of young people. So for our youth group, YODA, (Youth Opening Doors through Advocacy), we established a Facebook page, and it's not a

personal one. It's just if you are familiar with Facebook, you can set it up as an organization so people can "like" it and that's how we put information out about our classes. And just as things come across our desk, we put them there as well -- with an email address, the young person may check that once a week, but they are checking their Facebook six times a day.

The other thing I wanted to mention too is that in collaborating not just with the schools, but we have had a lot of success reaching out to other organizations that serve youth. And may not be reaching out because they don't have that experience. So having your center be something that can add to the Boys and Girls Club. We have a Missoula Youth Forum that talks about issues that young people in our community are dealing with. We have really done outreach to them, and said this is a population that you are not hearing from right now. So we can help do you that.

>> MARY OLSON: Along with that, they may have young people with disabilities involved in Girl Scouts or the Flagships and then we can add that extra information and referral piece to those students they have, that these other program directors might not know about.

AUDIENCE: I just wanted to touch quickly on a piece Mike was talking about, the Facebook page. Right now we are looking into the web site, apparently you can go online and it creates a, like, fake number for you and you can put in all the other numbers you want to text and put what you want in, and you can send out a mass text. I will let you know, I can type about 100 words a minute with two thumbs.

(Laughter).

So I don't know, Sierra, if you don't have anything else to add, should we move on to peer support?

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: Yeah, that's fine.

>> KATHY HATCH: There's one question from the audience, there have been a few others and you covered them beautifully as you went through, so I didn't ask them.

Do you teach skills from person-centered planning, like one-page profiles?

>> MICHAEL BEERS: Repeat it one more time.

>> KATHY HATCH: Do you teach skills from person-centered planning? And then they say, "like one-page profiles?"

>> MARY OLSON: If we can get more information on the one-page profile. As far as person-centered planning, if you are meaning consumer based, absolutely. So with the IEP we go if we can provide some tools but we helped to actually set their individual

goals, like an ILP and help walk through that process through their class. And then we can add in those resource pieces in the communication and leadership pieces that they are going to need to achieve that goal. Is that the question?

>> KATHY HATCH: That's definitely the person centered part I'm not sure the one-page -- oh, she says helping students identify what's important, helping them identify supports they could use and I think that's what you are saying.

>> MARY OLSON: Absolutely. Yeah. And Sierra, I don't know if you wanted to add on to that. We do a whole class on just resources that they can use.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: Yeah, and the other thing about the IEP, a lot of times that I have gone into an IEP meeting, they have the parent and the teachers or whoever all is involved and they are going, okay, what type of class does John want to take? He should take this. He needs this class for this credit and he needs this to graduate and we'll put him in this class. And, you know, before we finish, I'm going to go okay, well, what do you want to do, John? Do you want to take this class? A lot of times the student has a part to talk at the end, but they are never given a chance to really talk throughout the meeting and give their opinion and what they want.

And so it's very much person centered when saying, what do you want? And changing the focus of the IEP from, "we have to meet this criteria and that criteria and this criteria in order for them to graduate." Instead I'll say, okay, "what do you want to do? Speak your mind" and that kind of thing. And that's really how I word the whole entire conversation and then towards the end of the IEP meeting, the teachers are saying, okay, "what would you like? Does this sound good you to?" They are including them to make sure that their opinions are included and it's not just what's needed to graduate but how can they be successful in their classes. If they don't care about their classes a lot of times they won't invest in that.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: A better thing to try is student-led IEPs. This is when you engage the student prior to the IEP meeting where they can set goals, see their plan, what they have worked on from the past or what goals they set in the previous IEP meeting. They know if they met them, or if those goals have changed. Letting the student start off the IEP meeting by having everybody introduce themselves, and then having the student introduce him or herself and say, "Welcome to my IEP meeting. The last IEP meeting we had, we covered these goals. My goal is..." -- then the student gives an update of the status of those goals and maybe those goals either were not completed or completed or changed. That gives the student more control over what type of classes they want to take. Maybe they don't want to go to an arts class but would rather take an English class and so on and so forth. It's giving the student the power to lead that IEP and going in prepared to be able to lead that IEP meeting.

>> KATHY HATCH: Yeah.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: I know Mike and Mary, you can talk about the pre-planning you do with your youth for IEP meetings.

>> MARY OLSON: You transitioned us beautifully into what we will talk a lot about during the self and system advocacy part. That's definitely a huge piece of self-advocacy. Sierra reminded me of something on the independent living skills training piece and that whole piece that Sierra was talking about in the IEP. It doesn't matter to us if the parent called us in, if it was the teacher that called us in, if it was the student who called us in. At the end of the day, we are an IL center and we always answer to the person with a disability. So that's that young person. We are there for them.

And so that's exactly right. We want to make sure that their goals are being met, they are being listened to. At the end of the day, you know, they are kind of our boss. So -- along with that, that piece that Sierra was talking about, just pulling from the student what they want, what they need. What we have heard from our teachers is that they also enjoy us coming into their classes and their IEPs, because we open them up to that whole new way of working with that student. And we have had teachers taking notes during the class just as fast as the students, saying, gosh, that's a great way to get that information out. Look at how excited they are. How did you get them to say that? You know?

But --

>> MICHAEL BEERS: Just before we move on, I would add that in our classes and our IEPs we have gotten into the habit of bringing the resources to the student. So on the Resource Day, we bring in people from our state assistive technology program, called Montech. We either have someone from Montech come in with the devices or we rent the equipment and bring it into the classroom and say who could use this piece of equipment? How would they use it? What disabilities would this help accommodate? We also have voc rehab come in. So being that person that, again, introduced the school and the student to these resources, by having them actually in front of the classroom is a strategy that we found works a lot.

>> KATHY HATCH: Folks, just real quick -- back to the question before about the one-page profile, she says a one-page profile, a one-page snapshot about a person and then person-centered thinking, one-page profile and there's a web site here too that she refers to. Does that mean anything to you? You kind of covered the background of how you get information from people and document it.

>> MARY OLSON: I think that it -- you know, so I have never used those particular pieces, however, you know, that's great. If you have resources, use them. You know, we -- we use our own here. We call it the "Who Am I" sheet?

>> KATHY HATCH: Mm-hmm.

>> MARY OLSON: Technically we have the students fill out that sheet on the first day of class. We say that being an advocate is getting what you want and what you need. Before being an advocate you have to know what you want and what you need. This is what I'm good at. This is what I need help with. This is what I want.

>> KATHY HATCH: That sounds like probably what she's talking about. Jen, if you are on there, hopefully that answers your question.

>> MARY OLSON: Great.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: And just another piece. Centers of independent living are consumer controlled. So I know Mary talked about if the parent brings us in or if the teacher brings us in, we need to make sure the student knows they are in control. They are the ones saying, okay, this is what I want and empowering them in that way, because -- that's a skill that they are going to need not just in IEPs but they will need it in their first job. Its really relaying to them that this is making sure you understand this is all about you now. This is a skill you have and be able to voice that and give them the skill. Its more just to empower them to know that they are in control. They are the ones that will have the skill and can take this other places too. Just another add-in.

>> KATHY HATCH: Mm-hmm. Okay. Do you want to move on to the next core service?

>> MARY OLSON: Oh, yeah! We were going to talk about peer support, but I will leave that one for last, just because -- well, I'm the peer advocate coordinator. So I'm a little bit biased, but I think peer support is within all the other services. So why don't we talk about systems advocacy so we can talk about the IEPs. Here we do work with the students request our help in their IEP, we will meet with them before the IEP and sit down with them and help them prepare. [We tell them] "These are the questions they are going to ask you. This is what they have to ask you. This is what your rights are." All that information so first of all they understand it.

What we find is a lot of our students -- you know, all of a sudden you are a freshman and you get an invitation in the mail and you are like, What's an IEP? They don't really know what it is. And the other piece that we do is if they want our help in doing a self-directed IEP, we do have some tools that Mike and I have put together here. One thing that we found is that our students really like to do things on the computer. So we put together a shell (or template) for a self-directed IEP PowerPoint. So it has - These are the things you have to talk about. What am I good at? What am I not so good at? They add their own pictures. They fill in their own answers. They put sounds in it and make things fly in and fly out and they actually have a really good time with it.

And then we help them call the school and let them know, I will be presenting a PowerPoint. The school needs to have these facilities for me in order to present it to everybody.

And those have been really successful. Our students have told us that they like the PowerPoint demos. "This is a situation where all of these people are sitting around the table. Usually they talk and I listen." This is the relationship that you have in school. You know, a teacher talks, you listen. All of a sudden they are like, What do you think? You speak now. The students like it because maybe they don't want to talk and they just want to flip through the slides. That's okay.

That's one way that we do the self-advocacy piece. We also go into IEPs sometimes when they are not going so well. Maybe the parent or the student doesn't feel like they have equal or appropriate education. We can go with them to the IEP and the simple act of having an advocate there with you, makes you feel more comfortable and gives you more credit in a situation where people might not be treating you with as much respect as you deserve. That kind of changes that whole dynamic.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: And Mary, I'm going to talk a little bit about IEPs and what I have done here in our center. You know, we really talk about what is supposed to be in an IEP. Mary, you talked about how this is, you know, teachers talk and you listen. We tell students: You can talk! This is your IEP! They say: What is this about? We say: I know in the halls you don't want people talking behind your back, so you want to be at your IEP meeting. This is not a time for a parent/teacher meeting. This is to hear what you want and hear about your goals and how your accommodations are working for you.

I know one of the challenges that my students often face is the communication. And so we really work on the communication. If I don't agree with what they are saying about the challenges I may have, how can I communicate that best? Should I yell at them and then get thrown out of my IEP meeting? Or should I, you know, maybe sit down and talk this over or write this down because I know that I'm not happy with this.

So we really talk about a lot of communication of how is this going to work if I hear something that I don't agree with. What's the best way to communicate that in the IEP meeting? And how to make sure that my voice is heard in a strong manner, but not an aggressive manner. To make sure that they know that this is really what I want. Because a lot of times their opinions may not be heard or the communication that they used is in the past hasn't been successful. So it's kind of just assumed that the student is still going to be more aggressive.

And just empowering them to know that this is how you can communicate how you feel.

If you don't agree with it, let's talk about it. Let's open the communication but not get aggressive.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: So I just wanted to add that before you moved on, Mary.

>> MARY OLSON: I'm so glad you did. You know me, I had too much coffee and I could

ramble on for hours. In our class, one way we emphasize the importance of the student being at the IEP meeting is to say, first of all, if you are there, it's harder for people to talk about you while you are there. You know, it kind of gives that little bit of peace where they have to think about you as a person if they see you there. And second, we tell the students about playing the game telephone. I don't know if you played that when you were kids, but I come up with something silly like "I like mashed potatoes and gravy and turkey" and then we have them whisper to the person next to them and next to them. And inevitably, it's never what they originally said.

It's a great way to illustrate to someone, that if you tell somebody your goal, how can you be sure that your goal is what they are telling the IEP team. Because things can get lost in transition.

All right, other ways we do advocacy. Mike, do you want to talk about the systems advocacy that our youth group has done?

>> MICHAEL BEERS: Yeah, I will tell you about our youth group. So our classes go into the school. And two people from our center go to where the students are going to be anyway. And from that, we said we want a group that will facilitate the youth coming to us, coming to our center and we want to open it up to young people. So not just high school students, but youth, and we define youth both at APRIL and our Independent Living Center as 13 to 30ish.

So in that age range, you know, and on either end. You know, you will have young people there. We've had young people as young as 10 get involved in some of our programs, and with YODA, we have some who are 35 at our meeting. It's not a cut off. But that's how we define youth.

And when we started the first time, our first YODA, a colleague of mine, who is our advocacy person, said we want to use this as an opportunity to inform the youth of what's going on, the issues we want you to start working on, and you should automatically care about this. We found out very quickly that you can't force advocacy on people. You can't make them care necessarily about what you want to work on.

So it kind of fizzled out and in the last two years, we have really jump started it again with the main idea being, you know what, we are going to ask you and we're going as a center, facilitate what your ideas are, what effects your life. The number one thing they came to us at the first meeting was about Social activities. We want to be out there having a good time. We struggled with that as an independent living center because what we didn't want was, you know, okay, the disabled people just getting together socially. We tried to figure out how do we facilitate people being more social with an independent living flavor?

And so that was the first barrier we attacked as a goal. How can we help young people get out into the community and what we do socially.

>> KATHY HATCH: Excuse me again. I'm sorry but that breathing is really interrupting again. I'm not sure who that is or what -- how this is happening but every time the breathing --

>> MARY OLSON: Did somebody invite Darth Vader on the call?

>> KATHY HATCH: Yes, we have a Darth Vader. They are breathing into the mouth piece. Make sure you star six and stop breathing into the phone.

>> MARY OLSON: But keep breathing.

>> MICHAEL BEERS: That's what we had to start with. To this day, we meet once a month, but we also plan social events throughout the year. Like tonight, actually, we are going bowling. But we're going to talk about this is. Mary is going to ride the bus with four of our youth to teach them, okay, this is transportation, how you might be able to get to the bowling alley. And this is skills training, so if you have trouble putting on your shoes, this is who you ask or if you need the bumpers. How can we, you know, kind of do that travel training model with social events?

And once we, got them hooked with those, they really blossomed and the issues that they wanted to deal with kind of emerged. A lot of our young people talk about bullying very openly. So as issues came up around bullying, whether it's other students or teachers or whoever, it was a big thing in our state.

>>MARY OLSON: We actually had para-educators who were bullying students with disabilities. We put our young people in front of a camera and we said, OK, how do you feel about this? Has this ever happened to you? What's your experience?

>> MIKE BEERS: Like Mary said, they had a lot to say. Just no one had ever asked the question. Get it together and put it on YouTube and put it on your web site. It was, you know, that systems advocacy of just saying, this is an issue for me. And this is how I feel about it. It was really our first systems advocacy goal that we worked on.

>> MARY OLSON: Along with that, you know, within our youth group, we kind of helped them to get involved in other aspects of our center. During legislative sessions, we go to our state Capitol. We do our poster day. Sometimes we do rallies, depending on the year and the legislators. And we make sure that we bring youth with us. There's no better way to get a youth addicted to advocacy than being in that air, at a rally where the energies are high and people are passionate. That's what youth want. They want to see passion.

So along with that, you know, we brought two of our BALLS people with us to testify on the need for youth and funding statewide. They went in there. I expected them to be shy and say one or two things but, gosh, those guys wrote speeches! And they stood up

there or, you know, sat there depending upon the combination, and they -- they spoke so eloquently that I saw legislators on the edge of their seats and some of them came up to them afterwards and said, that was the most impactful testimony I've heard today. Because it came from the student themselves, in their words. And, you know how legislative days usually happen, we had to wait for hours. They pushed us back. We had to drive in a Montana snowstorm to get there. You know, what could go wrong did. And still as we dropped these students off at home, they looked at me and said, "When can we go again?" "That was awesome! I want to do it again."

>> MICHAEL BEERS: Mm-hmm. Yeah. And with the impact it had when they got back to school and just the confidence, because, you know, this isn't just something that everybody does. As a student with a disability, they've never gotten to do it. This is something that, none of the other students in the school had done -- was to go to their state capitol and not just take a tour, but actually testify in front of their representatives. You know, so we've had a lot of our students that have helped us with systems advocacy get invited to speak at their own schools to talk with other students about their experience with advocacy, and be a role model. Which, you know, is another one of those old Ed quotes that I love that we started with.

It took Ed realizing that he was powerful and it took understanding that he could help someone else, before he realized how powerful he could be and what an advocate he could be. That's what I think IL can really offer a young person, just that light bulb moment of I have something to offer everyone else.

>> MARY OLSON: Kathy, I have a quick question, are we going to get to go over five minutes or so because of the technical problems --

>> KATHY HATCH: I was going to say that. If no one objects we can go another 10 or 15 minutes because we did get started late. If folks do want to stick around, they do have a few more things to say. We will go to about quarter to 5pm -- well, about 15 more minutes.

>> MARY OLSON: Great.

>> KATHY HATCH: Is that too much time?

>> Well, can I say something? I thought they didn't start until 1:00. That's the time I got -- I thought it was going from 1 to 2:30.

>> KATHY HATCH: That's correct. Yes, it's almost 4:30 EST right now. It should be the right time.

>> Well, I'm in Arizona.

>> KATHY HATCH: Okay, it would have been an hour before that. It would have been

12:00 your time, I think because it started at 3:00 on the East Coast. And it would be three hours earlier, I believe, in Arizona.

You know what, there will be a transcript and the audio version of this will be available on the APRIL web site after the call. So if anybody wants to, you know, listen to it again or go back and check that, it's in a couple of days it should be there. Okay?

>> Okay. Thank you.

>> MARY OLSON: I just wanted to say a couple more things on self-advocacy again before I chuck it back to Sierra. They have some really creative ways of practicing self advocacy at their YLF in Raleigh. Other ways we do some self-advocacy is we really help students to understand Section 1 of the ADA, which is employment, and we really go through in great detail with our students on, what are your rights when it comes to a reasonable accommodation? What is a reasonable accommodation? How do you disclose a disability? How do you ask for an accommodation? And then we actually go through JAN which is Job Accommodation Network online with them. If you don't know what your accommodations are, here are some ways that you could be accommodated.

And we really find that they really appreciate that because that's a piece that is really left out in the schools. They talk about soft skills, but the whole skill of disclosure and accommodation is left out.

>> MICHAEL BEERS: Mm-hmm. I just wanted to add real quick too -- Mary mentioned reaching out to our Voc Prep classes, which are a specific class at our high school where teachers set up students in special ed with job opportunities in the community for that class and they get paid for it through the school.

We have had teachers approach us in the community about one of those job placements for their student. So a young person with a disability will come in as an employee for one or two hours a week. We've also done job assessments with young people with disabilities, and opened up internships, which have been really successful as a way to get young people in the door. So, we all know when we get into IL, and we all have our jobs, maybe there's those one or two things it would be helpful to have an intern to do those, whether it's logging or just helping to set up for a meeting. And that's a good introduction, and it does help the student empower themselves to understand, this is what an office is like, and these are, my peers... my professional peers.

So there's a lot of mentoring that can go on within the context of an internship, and that's why that's something we have kept going for two or three years now. It seems we always have at least one youth intern around.

The other thing we have gotten involved with is having young people work side by side with business opportunities and job shadowing in their community for a day.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: Okay, well, there's a ton of stuff. One thing that I was going to mention you guys talked about the youth group that you started and all of those types of things. I know we've talked about, like consumer control and asked them what they want. That's something I did hear at our center. One month we have game night and then advocacy skills. This month they decided to do a disability etiquette video. They realize people don't know the etiquette or things to do for people with disabilities or, you know, how not to treat people with disabilities. They are actually making a video Monday night on disability etiquette and then this fall they want to go show it to some of the local schools. So that's one way that they're reaching out. I know Mary mentioned the youth leadership forum here.

One of main things we have done in our Youth Leadership Forum is have them look at their community and see what changes could be made. How could it be more accessible for them? How could it be more accommodating to people with disabilities in that area? Because its a statewide event, they are from across the whole state, which shows a lot of different issues and our Youth Leadership Forum is 15 and up. We helped them write their testimonies down and then we coordinated with the legislative offices and had actual legislators come and sit and listen to our delegates come and give their testimonies and say what they had written down and some of the issues that they have seen and, you know, once you have done that -- like Mike said -- you can go back to school and that's something nobody else has done. They can go back to their family and their community and follow that up. That gives them that empowerment.

Do we want to move to peer support, Mary?

>> MARY OLSON: Oh, I just wanted to throw in one more thing about making it "youthy." When they are doing their advocacy projects, like Sierra was saying, let them get creative, because they will. YouTube clips are great. Something that we have been working with here is giving students cameras and have them take pictures of places they think they are being discriminated in or take pictures of inaccessible places or show us from your point of view what it's like to be a youth and take pictures of things that affect you. They come back with some awesome stuff.

I think it's called Photo Voice. There might have been a group in maybe Wyoming or something, I went to a session on it at April, and --

>> KATHY HATCH: South Carolina. South Carolina. That's Nathan Todd and the disAbility Resource Center down there.

>> MARY OLSON: We have really been using that here and the students love it.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: Hold on real quick, Mary. You reminded me of one other thing. One other thing we did in the past, when we go into the schools they have us meet with the whole occupational studies group, and that's what Mike and Mary have been talking about in the Voc Prep program. We have them break up and evaluate their school on

disability. We have one school that's old, and the accessibility is not that great. It opens their eyes to see what type of disability would be affected by this inaccessible bathroom. What does that lead to? Is the cafeteria accessible?

It makes them look around their everyday life and at the same time, the teachers are going, "Wow, I didn't realize that. It gives the whole school awareness, whereas the students were identifying it and the students were learning what is accessible and what is not accessible? So that's another thought.

>> KATHY HATCH: Do you guys want to see if there are any questions at this point. We are getting short on time now.

>> MARY OLSON: Yep, we definitely can.

>> KATHY HATCH: Questions out there?

>> Hi, this is Kaley with San Juan center for independence in Farmington, New Mexico. Can you hear me?

>> MARY OLSON: Yep.

>> Okay. I do have a question. A lot of things that you guys are mentioning doing today we have tried to do, and the biggest roadblock that I'm meeting is getting our youth to want to actually hang out with each other because of the differences in disabilities. Any advice on what I can do on that?

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: Mary, I will let you take it. I was just going to say one thing, we have asked the youth group if they want to open it up to other people without disabilities. Do they want to bring their friends that they already know to a group to make them feel more welcome? I know there's a twin that's come before and she was very anxious about coming. So she brought her twin, and so they kind of were there but then they got to mingle with other people. So I really let them decide, okay, what kind of group is this? Do you want this just to be disabilities only or do you want to open it up to other people in the community and let them have the control of that choice.

And then you have more people, more youth involved, not just people with disabilities. You are now educating people without disabilities and they can meet more people.

>> One of the things that we used to do with the El Paso youth leadership is we had students talk about their disability and how it affected them. What kind of things affected them and how they did things differently and understanding that we all, whether we have a disability or not, do things differently and it's okay to be open to that – to those differences.

>> MARY OLSON: Also a great place to do some of those creative activities that we

talked about, like showing how we are all connected, no matter what the disability is. You are right, at the end of the day, a lot of times what we tell them is you know what, come to the youth group meeting. See if you like it. If you don't like it, you don't have to stay. I have actually had a young man who was not going to come. He came and met with me and he's like, oh, well, you guys are normal. It's okay. You know, I'm excited to go. So --

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: And another way I have actually done it too, I had a youth say that -- this is their words, I'm not as disabled as them, I don't need to go. I said, well, we always need volunteers. He's like, oh, I need that for school. He started coming in and he was listening in to the conversation. Now he doesn't see it as disabled/not disabled, you know, whatever. He sees it as, oh, this is Susie, and she's my friend kind of thing.

So to bring him in in a different aspect. It's opened his eyes that he's really not against it. And you're getting a volunteer out of it too.

>> KATHY HATCH: Great idea.

>> MARY OLSON: Right. More questions?

>> KATHY HATCH: Any other questions? Okay. We've got about five minutes left.

>> MARY OLSON: Really?

>> KATHY HATCH: That's about it.

>> I have sort of a question and a comment. This is Carolee from Dawn Center of Independent Living in New Jersey. I was wondering early in the discussion we were talking about engaging young people and I was wondering if anybody is making any attempt to do that through social media.

>> MARY OLSON: Yep. Short answer, yes.

>> KATHY HATCH: I think they mentioned Facebook. Mike mentioned Facebook at one point, and --

>> Oh, okay. I know there was some talk about Facebook pages and I see that there are -- that YODA has a Facebook page. I was just wondering, you know, what the experience has been about whether that's working. If do you know, if there's actually an engagement occurring.

>> MARY OLSON: Well, to answer this quickly. So here's the thing, we actually don't get a lot of engagement on the YODA Facebook page itself, but we do hear that they are reading our posts. They don't post back to us, which we're hoping to eventually get that going. We would like to use it like a living blog where they can post questions and

information.

>> Right.

>> MARY OLSON: It's not there yet. The other thing is Mike and I have a Facebook page for work, that we call the Mike and Mary Show. And to be honest, that's how I do a lot of my work with the youth. They message us on our Facebook page. They private message us with questions on information referral questions, on when is the next meeting coming up, when is the next this? Can you do this? Can I come in and see you? A lot of our appointment setting and a lot of our interaction with our youth are through the Mike and Mary Show page. So if you don't have a work Facebook page, and you want to reach out to youth, I recommend it.

I also recommend not giving out your actual personal Facebook page, but making that separation of, This is for work, people. This is for personal. That's something that we had to find out the hard way. You want to draw that line in the sand early.

>> Thank you.

>> MARY OLSON: Yep.

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: And another thing is I have a lot of consumers that don't feel -- maybe they come into youth group or they don't feel comfortable talking one on one, and they haven't made the connection to meet with me one on one, but they are better at typing out what they want to say. I will have a chat with them and talk about something like, this is my issue in school right now or how do I feel with this problem? And it's all through Facebook chat because that's where they feel comfortable. So that's another way to connect with them.

>> I have a question. This is Brian Mosley from Augusta, Georgia, Walton Options for independent living. When you have educators who are apprehensive about letting IL staff into the schools to address some of the issues with the special ed kids or children with disabilities, what is another approach for either reaching out to the students or the teachers themselves so they will allow us into the schools?

>> MARY OLSON: I always approached it as, "Let me give you a break. This is your time to not have to teach for a little bit. Let me come in and help you guys. I know this is a part of your IEPs that you have to meet -- information and transition and we can teach a little bit of that." So I offer that and I say, Hey, this is free. You don't even have to pay for it. So I really try to come to them and offer a break for the teachers. They are still there and a lot of times actually, they get involved in our class, but they also, you know, need that break during the day and they are like, okay, well, this is something I'm struggling to find resources on.

SIERRA: So this will give me an opportunity to be a good resource and sometimes

when I meet with teachers, I have given them like a little mini TAIL class. This is one of the games that we are going to play and those type of things. So they know what we are talking about.

>> Yeah.

>> KATHY HATCH: One more question real quick and then we need to get going. This is from someone out in our chat audience. "Since school is out, summer is near. The students will be out of high school and I have been searching high and low for recreation centers that provide services and accommodations for youth with disabilities. Any ideas?"

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: Actually, we just now started working with the Parks and Recs systems here because as a center of independent living, we use the public bus system to teach travel training during outings and social events, like Mike and Mary were talking about. But there's times when, you know, the Raleigh Parks and Rec, the city, their budget has been cut. They don't have the staff but they have a gym and they need youth to come in, and they really don't know how to make that bridge happen. A lot of times we trade. What we have been planning is I will use your gym and I will provide the staff if you could bring your staff and we'll use your resources. So we will use your gym or any equipment that we need to maybe play kick ball or, you know, know that bridge supports one of the adaptable sports programs uses the gym there. How can it work for you? And how can it work for me to get the best out of what each person needs.

>> KATHY HATCH: Mm-hmm. The best out of what each person needs. What a great way to end the conversation.

(Laughter).

>> SIERRA ROYSTER: Exactly!

>> KATHY HATCH: I'm really going to have to call it now folks. It's been a wonderful conversation and I'm sure you guys could have gone on forever. I know these guys can continue to go on for hours talking about this. They are so psyched, but I do need to close up. I want to say thank you so much to Mike and Mary and Sierra for all of your wonderful information today, and thank you all for being here too to all the rest of you folks who are out there.

Again, I would like you to visit the APRIL web site and you will find a transcript of today's presentation, it's www.APRIL-rural.org and look for IL Conversations. If you have any questions about today's discussions, you can reach me at kathatch@charter.net .

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Department of Education. No official endorsement of the Department of Education should be inferred. Thanks, everybody. Good-bye, and have a great afternoon.

(End of meeting)