

Webinar: Employment Collaboratives: Providers & Employers Join Forces, November 29, 2017

Start at 00:27

Joan Rapp: All right. Well welcome everyone to our webinar on Employment Collaboratives: Providers and Employers Joining Forces. And I'm so delighted to welcome your three presenters today from three of our favorite New England states. I'm Hugh Bradshaw, David Smith, and Stephanie Marks. And we're going to let Hugh go first, and he will introduce us to what is a collaborative and we'll go from there.

Hugh Bradshaw: Thank you, Joan. Hi folks. Greetings from the great state of Vermont, where it's chilly and cold, and we're waiting for lots of snow. I just want to share a little bit of our experience around our employment teams here in Vermont, how we got there, and some of the things that we've learned along the way. So now to begin with, when we first started looking at this, we had some Medicaid infrastructure funding available to us, and so we released a request for proposals to a communities all around the state to develop community employment teams. And originally we funded four districts in the state based on those applications. It was a small amount of money, there's not a lot of money, a lot of money. It was really more to just cover the costs of some food and beverages for the initial meetings in some printing costs and things like that. And then we found over time that we quickly expanded from those four districts, two additional districts because other people were hearing about the work and the collaborative and were really interested in that. So they began to grow organically without any funding at all really in many of the other communities around the state.

So, we had started those initial four, and then in the midst of the growth of the collaboratives, we had something called, Challenges for Change initiative here in Vermont. This was a result of the economic downturn, and there was a lot of focus on making government more efficient by collaborating, coordinating, and streamlining services. And so at the time, we were asked if we had any ideas around how to improve the employment programs that were funded through our agency of Human Services, of which there were many. And we had heard for years from businesses, who were oftentimes very frustrated with the fact that there were so many different employment programs in every community and in many respects they weren't collaborating, they weren't communicating, and in fact, they were working, they were competing with each other for employer's attentions on behalf of their customers. So we knew we needed a better way to coordinate our outreach to businesses. And in fact, we also thought that it would be a way to actually expand business outreach activities, if we knew what each other was doing, we could actually do a better job of doing that outreach. So the way we structured our creative workforce solutions initiative, which is the initiative that came out of that Challenges for Change discussion was we established business account manager statewide, and they act as the facilitators for these employment teams. Participation of some of the funded programs was actually the language was a mandatory participation; it was in the contract language. And then other employment programs that they began to hear about this were also expressing interest in. While originally we were focusing on those AHS funded programs, we quickly realized that it made sense to pull anybody else in the community, who was doing employment outreach work with businesses, to bring them under the tent, so to speak, and make sure that they were part of that discussion about who's going where and

when and what have those conversations with employers. So it was nice to be able to expand that and bring more folks in over time.

So one of the key elements of the Creative Workforce Solutions Employment Teams was this notion of coordinated points of contact vs. a single point of contact for business engagement. We certainly recognize that every individual employment program in order to represent their customers and to really give them the benefit of their job development efforts had to have access to those employers. So we, we made it very clear from the beginning that we were not establishing a single point of contact where all conversations with that business had to go through one person. But rather that it was more around coordination, everyone's a job developer, but we want to have a way to capture that and make sure we know where each other is so that we're not tripping over each other basically.

We also understood that it was really important to leverage relationships. So if somebody has a solid relationship with an employer, we go with that person as the lead with that employer because we know that relationships are really the key to a really engaging businesses, and finding those opportunities for our customers. And then we also knew we needed a way to track this, and a way for people to have a transparent view of what everybody else was doing as far as employer engagement. So we purchased a salesforce, which is a pretty well-recognized customer relations management tool, and we're using that to track that business outreach and to really offer that transparently to everybody who has a license and is a part of the team. So that transparency was also very, very important.

Some of the logistics of doing this, it was we knew it was very important to establish protocols around business engagement to make sure that we were getting this right and also to make sure that people weren't feeling that we were stifling their access to employers, so we agreed that you always start with the primary contact for that business and again, that's identified in salesforce. We know that warm handoffs are oftentimes really, really helpful. So if you have a good relationship with an employer, and you introduce somebody else on your team to that employer, that's much easier and a much better way to engage with that business than having that other person go and do another cold call. So wherever possible, we're trying to leverage those existing relationships. And then we also we recognized, and I was a former job developer, so I know this all too well, that you know when you're an employment consultant and you spend two years establishing a relationship with a business and you finally have some traction, to have somebody else go into that business and blow it up is a real fear. And so the natural tendency is to hold those contacts very close and not share them with other people so that you avoid that consequence. Unfortunately, what happens is you limit opportunities for our customers. So we'll talk a little more about that.

So when we talk about meetings, we do make sure that we have a good structured meeting so people know what to expect in every meeting, and that it's consistent from meeting to meeting. So we always start with success stories that kind of sets the table for the conversation, and it's a great way to recognize people's good work out in the community. Then we have a section on leads and needs. And interestingly, we started this section was actually just leads, and we would get to that section and we would hit dead air. And then one of our business account managers said, "Well, what about if we ask people about their needs for their case load?" And once we started that conversation, the flood gates opened, and people really began to share, "I've got a person, I kind of hit the wall. I don't know where to go next." And then some really nice organic brainstorming that goes on in these employment teams to

help that person, including contacts and businesses that people may have a relationship with. So once people got to that place where they understood that this was really about the customers that we serve, and that in fact, if we leverage each other's expertise in our context and the business community, we can actually find many more opportunities for folks. So that was really cool.

We also talk about labor market information, and this is oftentimes where the business account manager is sharing who they've been meeting with that week, what businesses they've been outreaching to, where those opportunities both for paid employment, but also for things we call it progressive employment. The things like job shadows, work experiences, mock interviews, informational interviews, things like that. And then oftentimes, they also invite a business or a program to present. So for a business they may come in and talk about the application process, who they're looking for, what kind of skillsets; and programs also have an opportunity to present about what their program is all about, what is the eligibility, what kinds of services can they provide to individuals. And then again, as I mentioned, this notion of working on stuck cases, or really tough cases with other peers, has been a powerful piece for folks. In many cases, these smaller community rehab programs have one, maybe two job developers, and they kind of work in a vacuum, and they don't have an opportunity to talk to other people doing similar work. So this venue allows them that opportunity to have those conversations.

So, some of the lessons we've learned: we learned that you absolutely have to clearly define what is the purpose for the group. You really need to focus on providing quality services to employers, because at the end of the day, that's what this is all about. Without those employers, we don't have opportunities for our candidates. We also have found that this provides broader access to a much wider range of opportunities for our candidates. So if we leverage each other's skills and our time and our outreach efforts, we can actually talk to quite a few more employers. If I know where you're going and you know where I'm going, we can reduce the duplication of effort and actually do some a broader outreach to more employers. And then we also knew that there was a real benefit to having that peer support, as I mentioned before, for those job developers, particularly new job developers, because they come into a group that's already established, already has good relationships with employers, and some good expertise around how to how to do this work. So that's been a real bonus. We hear this from the newer a job developers all the time, how thankful they are that they have this group that they can bounce ideas off of, or get feedback, or have get some mentoring support.

One of the things that we talked about a lot when we talked about these groups is historically, if I had a relationship with an employer, I would hold it pretty close; and if I didn't have anybody on my case load to fit that job opening, it would kind of die there. And that was a shame. And so we understood that we needed to develop a mechanism where if I didn't have anybody on my case load that was a match for that business, I need to find a way to share that with other folks and, our teams have become a way to do that. And at the end of the day, the employer really doesn't care what program a great employee you came from. They really don't care. They don't even want to look under the hood of Human Services, frankly. So if it's a success for the team, that's for every individual on that team. And you know, there was this, became this understanding that, you know what, if I help you today and your candidate has a success; at some point, I'm going to need your help for one of my candidates, and then I'm going to have success for them as well.

We also, it's really important to understand that when you're building relationships with businesses, it takes time, so you have to go slow and it's built over time. It's not a one shot. So, the same applies when we're talking about team members on one of these employment team. It takes a while to build that trust. It takes a while to get to a place where somebody is willing to share some of the things that otherwise they really are hesitant to do. So you need to do to build that rapport and trust between members, and some of the things that we've done is shared projects, shared job fairs, things that we could be doing together as a team that helps build that team over time. We did find a meeting facilitation training for our business account managers was very helpful. How to run a good meeting, how to address concerns, or sometimes you have people who will drag a meeting down. How do you move that forward, using things like parking lots and other strategies around meeting facilitation. So that was really good. The other thing we learned here in Vermont, kind of the hard way, was we came forward with the CWS initiative right on the heels of a couple of pretty significant reorganizations in state government, where a lot of people lost a lot of jobs. And so I think there was initially a real worry on the part of some of our CRP partners that this CWS initiative and the employment coalitions were really just another reorg, and that at some point the hammer was going to come down and people were going to lose their jobs. Needless to say, that wasn't the case in, and folks now are much more comfortable understanding that this was really about serving businesses and our customers better. So that's a good thing.

We also learned that we have to be very consistent in our services to business, and this is again, where we come to agreement as a team around some of the things that we can agree to around working with employers: timely follow up; regular check-ins with businesses, particularly if somebody is in work experience or some kind of or employment for that matter that we're checking in to make sure that we're doing okay. It's also important to make sure that if you're not going to be around if you're on vacation or if you're out for any period of time, that you have a backup and that you've identified to your employers who that backup is and how to get ahold of them. The one thing we've learned is businesses are much more willing to play if they know for sure they can pick up the phone and have somebody answer their concerns or deal with something that may be going on in the workplace right away. If there's a two or three day lag, they're done working with you quite frankly. So this notion of responding very quickly to employers is something we all came to as an agreement between us as a team, and that's something that we do, and again, that agreed upon service delivery by all the partners is really critical.

So when we talk about individuals in the community Rehab and treatment programs, folks with persistent mental illness; one of the things that, again I mentioned earlier, but this notion that employment consultants actually get access to the resources and expertise of others is really critical and the ability to leverage those relationships that people have built with other businesses. That notion of problem solving when you've hit the wall as far as ideas of where to go next for an individual. And then the other thing that we really have seen is that we have a much wider diversity in the types of jobs and the kinds of work environments because we are maximizing our business outreach. So if we're really doing this correctly, we can be out there meeting with many more businesses and that we're bringing those leads back to individuals who are served in the programs.

We also have staff in salesforce and in their work with businesses, they're always asking those questions around progressive employment activities. And so are they interested in doing work experiences? Are

they willing to do an OJT? Are they even willing to do something as simple as a company tour, so the person get a chance to see what that workplace looks like and see if it's a fit for them? It's a great way for somebody with little or no work history or a lot of job jumping to get their foot in the door. And for employers, it's a great mechanism for them to find out if somebody is a fit. We, these are normally, these are not long-term engagements. These are normally four to eight weeks when we talk about a work experience. They're very targeted, they're very intentional to employment as an outcome; but it does give the employer a chance to see if the person is a fit, and in fact, to see if the business is a fit for the individual. So it's really a try before you buy for both parties and then again, it's a great way to it.

Joan: This is Joan. I just wondered if you could give us a very short description of what you mean by progressive employment. People may not be familiar with that term.

Hugh: Yeah. So progressive employment is actually a continuum of engagement, options for businesses to meet candidates. So it could be something as simple as an informational interview, where an individual can be with an employer and learn more about that business and asks some questions. It could be a mock interview, where they actually run through what would replicate a real interview. And then it's job shadows, where they can look and they can watch people doing the job, and not necessarily put their hands on it, but they're able to watch it. We do work experiences, which is probably the most prevalent of the activities. This is where the four to six weeks, and it's where somebody is actually in a workplace, usually about 20 hours a week or less; and they're a trainee, they're literally being trained, but the difference rather than sending them to a welding school, they're being trained by the employer in the workplace. So we've built this progressive employment model, and we offer it to employers and it's been very well received by the employers as well.

Joan: Great, thank you.

Hugh: So, other value, obviously a progressive employment to me seems like a wonderful consumer choice model, so it allows somebody to explore various career options without actually making any kind of a commitment. And then oftentimes during these work experiences, we're also working on reducing barriers, working on accommodations, figuring out other sort of key pieces, including transportation, childcare coverage, things like that. So it's a great way for everyone to figure it all out before the business actually pulls the trigger on the hire. And that is it for Vermont and hopefully I did. Okay on time.

Joan: Well, you did, you actually have a couple minutes. So if people have any questions, they could type it in the little chat box there, or they could unmute their phone and actually ask you the question. People may want to wait until you have to hit star twice. Yeah, right. Twice. I also saw a couple of people typing in. While they're typing, I just want to acknowledge another role that Vermont has played that people might not be, everyone might not be aware of how the importance of this, but many years ago when Courtney Harding ended up doing her research on the last 19% of the people that left in the state hospital. And the long and short of it is that she found that the folks who were the most disabled in the mental health system, if they had supports, and once they got into the community, and mind you, there were no real programs at the time that 65% of them virtually grew out of their illness. And this was, you know, totally denied by the psychiatric community. But ultimately about 10 other studies replicated exactly what she found around the world. And so that was the beginning of a concept of recovery. Well,

the beginning of it within the system. I think there were other beginnings that were outside of the system, so we have to tip our hats to Vermont for that as well. Okay. Let's see what we have for questions. Yeah, you go ahead and run it real quick.

Hugh: So Lisa asked, "What businesses have you successfully partnered with and how are participants paid during the Progressive Work Experience?" This is one thing that varies by state. So I'm actually, we've been working through UMass Boston, ICI with four other states. We're working with Florida Blind, Oregon Blind, Maine General, and Nebraska General; and each approach is this a little bit differently. Here in Vermont, the way we do this as far as paying is we actually offer what's called a training offset. It's really literally a training offset to offset the individual's costs of getting to and from the training, and it's a minimal amount of money. It's \$20 for a full day and \$10 for a half day, so it's really literally to offset those expenses.

Joan: Car fare.

Hugh: Yeah. Other states are actually putting folks on payroll, either through their own agency or through partnering with other community rehab providers or even staffing agency, so it varies. But the underlying principle is the notion of employer fears that how do you get past those employer fears, and we had argued that the way to do that is actually plug somebody with a disability into a workplace, and let them experience a person as a person rather than as a label. And we've had tremendous success. Those other states are also seeing some really nice successes, including higher rehab rates for people who are doing these kinds of experiences. Certainly business satisfaction is very high; 88% of employers who we surveyed think this is a great model, and they really like it. As far as businesses, we partner with large and small. I can say that it tends to be smaller businesses, and Vermont, 80% of our businesses are 50 employees or less, so it's a significant portion of our business base. They're more willing to engage in these kinds of activities than some of the big guys. Now we have done things with the bigger folks, TJX companies, which is TJ Maxx and Marshall's and the some others. They've been very engaged with us as have some other larger a multistate businesses, but the small employers love this. They don't have HR departments. They really don't have a mechanism to meet candidates this way, so it really works well for them.

The next question is always the question, which I love. So Kathleen, thank you for asking this because the next thing that an employer asks after you asked them about having a person in their workplace is the **what if question**. So in our case we, this is an important piece. You have to make sure that you have general liability and worker's comp insurance coverage for these trainings. We do that here in Vermont through our state risk management policy. Other states do it because they're using another entity to be the payroll of record for the employer of record that they carry that liability; but regardless, you have to be able to ask that answer that question right away, when you're talking to an employer around the coverage piece,

"Was a database or spreadsheet created to manage the employer listing?" That's salesforce. So I mentioned that earlier in the presentation. This is a, it's a customer relations management tool that you purchased licenses for, very robust. It actually has many more features than we ever will need, but we use that to track all of this employer outreach work, so I can give you reports on who we've talked to,

when we've talked to them, and what are those conversations? We actually record activities, so the actual conversations or meetings that we're having, we can pull into that list as well.

Not sure. Kathleen White said concern with a star?

Joan: We'll get to that later. Go on.

Hugh: Then I see Lou asked the question, "Who have you had any experience with employer resource networks?" I'm not sure if this is different than employment networks under Ticket-to-Work. I see you've given me a link here. No, the answer is no. I have not interacted with this group. I have not, although I now have the website open certain take a look at it. So thank you for sending that, Lou.

Joan: Thank you, Lou. Alright, I think we're gonna move ahead to Stephanie. We finally get to see what she looks like. Go ahead Stephanie.

Stephanie Marks: Great. Can everybody hear me?

Joan: Yep, they're muted so they can't answer.

Stephanie: Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you so much for joining us today on this webinar to talk about employment collaboratives. I am outside of Boston, and in Massachusetts we actually have six employment collaboratives, and I have to say the folks in Vermont are very progressive because we actually learned a lot about what to do and what not to do by going up to Vermont. So I'm going to get into the presentation at this time.

And basically we had a Medicaid infrastructure grant, way back in 2008-09, and it was used to start establishing programs for people with disabilities. And Governor Patrick, at the time, asked employers what they needed so that they hire more people with disabilities. And employers said you need to streamline services, you know, major companies and even small companies don't need 20 or 30 different agencies calling on them per week to find out about their job openings. So we were asked at the time to start putting something together in terms of collaboration. The original employment collaborative was in central Mass, and that was through the Medicaid infrastructure grant was Work Without Limits that I mentioned, and we were doing that for several years, and this state was really happy with the outcomes. And they decided, especially the Department of Developmental Disabilities, to get more collaboratives up and running to really get folks with disabilities employed. So I'm going to get into how we actually do it.

So our mission is really to increase job opportunities for individuals with disabilities. And I want to mention that we work with individuals across all disabilities, that we're working with folks that are blind, folks that have mental illness, folks have had traumatic brain injury, they have developmental disabilities, medical disabilities; so really across the board. And what we try and do is promote cooperation over competition, which going back to what Hugh mentioned, if I'm a provider, agency job developer, and I have a great relationship with a company and I was able to place five people at that company, but there's 30 more jobs, why not take those 30 other jobs and bring them to a network because you're helping individuals that need employment and you're helping the company. So we're

really trying to promote cooperation over competition. And the collaboration is set up in a way throughout the state. We've got, I mentioned Central Mass, which is the original; and then we have greater Merrimack Valley, we have the North Shore Employment Collaborative, North Suburban, Greater Boston, we have South Shore, and then we have Western Mass. And the way the staffing works, we have staff in each region; some regions are a little bit larger than others with staff because we have some additional funding from the Department of Mental Health. But the staff in those regions really coordinate all of the activity that's taking place. And you can see, the number of cities and towns that in Central Mass, you're talking about a vast area covering 38 cities and towns, so all of the regions are similar. The collaborative membership includes employment service providers, community-based organizations from each area. We have state agency representation from Department of Developmental Services, Department of Mental Health, Mass Commission for the Blind. We also had the career centers in each region, and then employers in each region can get involved. So we've actually had a lot of luck by establishing a relationship with an employer in one region and getting some success stories. Then we have employers that have become statewide, so that's been really incredible.

The similar to Vermont, there's some very important roles in the collaborative: the business account manager is the person, the coordinator that I mentioned, and that person meets with employers representing everybody. So in Central Mass, for instance, as a business account manager, if there are 25 agencies that have individuals across all disabilities, the business account manager will go and meet with an employer on behalf of everybody. The business account manager provides a lot of consultation to job developers, and we have found in Massachusetts that there's tremendous turnover of employment specialists and job developers. So the coordinator/business account manager does a lot of training of those individuals, and they also follow the Labor trends. Our business account managers do not provide direct services to individuals, but they do, again, provide a lot of technical assistance to folks.

The other piece is the job developers. It really is a win-win situation because the job developers come to what's called, a job developer networking meeting, and we learned this from the folks up in Vermont. And they actually find out all about the labor market trends, who's hiring? What has the business account manager brought? We do it every other week, what kind of relationships that they developed, where are the jobs, what's going on? So these job developers can come to these meetings and find out about hundreds of different job openings. We also, with the job developers, we encouraged them to develop and maintain their own employer relationships. We have a very lean staff, but again, the job developers, where they have a relationship and they've already filled certain jobs. Well, the relationship is at least tell us about the job. So they share the job leads with the group, and they mentor fellow job developers, and so on. We do use a customer relationship management tool, called Zoho, which has been very useful for us.

So many of you are probably thinking, why should I collaborate, why should I give up what I've held closely in my relationship? Well, again, if you are a true collaborator and you are going to not just help yourself, but help others, why not collaborate? Bountiful job leads from everybody working together; and I believe that the more we do, the more we're helping people in need. So there's a lot of reasons for collaborating. Also, it's important because of the staff turnover that people get information, you know, how to write a resume, how to do online applications, how to get ready for interviews, how do you write a resume for someone who had two years that doesn't account for any employment? So by collaborating, folks are learning from their peers.

We are working with several hundred employers throughout the state. I would say we probably work with about 400-500. If you look at every region, these are some quotes that you can read at your leisure. We do have a lot of national companies I mentioned, that have regional presence. We're working with Tedesco, we're working with Enterprise Rent-a-Car, Raytheon, Cumberland Farms, CVS, Target, Chick Fillet, Wendy's, to name a few. So a lot of companies are working with us statewide, especially in this climate, where there's a lot more jobs than there are candidates.

So you're probably wondering what has been a success, and I can tell you that for the last several years, we have placed between 700-800 people. I would say in the last three years, our numbers have been that high. In FY 2017, we placed 775 individuals, and we just met, my team just met a couple of weeks ago, and as of October 31st, we're in FY 2018, the total number of placements is 225. We still have a long way to go. Our fiscal year runs from July 1st to June 30th. But not just the placements are taking place, there's a lot of general pre-work going on. What I mean by pre-work, there's a lot of folks that are going on interviews, they are filling out applications, they are sending out resumes, and that all helps people to get that pre-employment piece moving so that they can actually land a job. So there's a tremendous amount of activity due to collaboration, and we actually do a lot of trainings and programming. We bring in folks from companies to talk about what they're looking for, we have done a lot of mock interviewing programs, we've done how to fill out the online application, so there's a lot of training going on. We go on tours of companies so that the job developers and people that they serve can see the environment, what does it really mean to work in a hospital setting, what does it really mean to work at a CVS Pharmacy? So there's a lot of that going on, and I would say that each collaborative in this state probably does about 30 to 40 events a year. And the coordinators sometimes do the training, but they sometimes find someone that can do the training, and we actually are using Base Camp, which is an online communication tool. So everything is kept online, so if somebody misses a training, but they need to find out how do I write a resume for someone that has a two-year gap or how do I help someone to interview? All of that information is kept online.

So I mentioned a collaboration that we're doing with employers, a lot of the national employers and we actually have something very exciting going on with CVS Health. CVS is a Fortune 10 company. They have about 450,000 employees worldwide, and we are working with their workforce development program, and we are actually doing a skills training program all across this state, and folks that are interested go to a 10-week program. It's 60 hours, and they learn all different skills about being in the workplace. They actually go into CVS stores in their areas, and they learn how to merchandise, they learn how to do customer service. We bring them into Boston to a learning center one day during that training, and they learn about the cash register. And a lot of the cash registers now, if somebody can use an iPhone or a Droid, a lot of the cash registers can be learned very, very easily.

So this project has yielded a lot of results. CVS is hiring a lot of people, but we're finding that folks, even if they don't want to work at CVS and CVS doesn't hire them because they have a certificate of training, they can go to another sector of the employment, whoever's hiring and learn, use those skills and bring them, especially to other retail or pharmacy companies. I'm grossly and so on. So that's been incredible. And we're working with about four other companies to take the CVS prototype and bring it to other sectors. So it's very, very exciting what's going on with that. We feel that that's a huge benefit to the folks that we service because they're learning on-the-job skills, and the employers are actually developing their own pipelines. A lot of the hiring that we've done, if you look at the hiring sectors,

these are just some of the sectors that our folks have been hired into, and we've been asked by our funding agencies to really find competitive employment, meaning that there's a high demand in the labor market, folks are going to stay employed for some time. So we'd been watching the labor market very carefully in Massachusetts to make sure that that happened.

So I can only tell you that this has been incredible experience. We have hundreds of agencies across the state that never worked together that are working together. We're learning together, we're impacting the community, and we're hoping that from this webinar, you folks from across the country are able to take some of this information and possibly implement it in your own areas. We're willing to talk with you, come out to visit you, and if you're looking to start collaboratives, I think we've got lots to share. But again, I want to thank the amazing folks in Vermont for everything that they did. And I'm happy to take any questions that folks may have.

Joan: Yeah we'll have time now for a couple of questions and then after David Smith finishes, we'll have a little more time for questions either typed or on the phone. Thank you very much, Stephanie. That's very exciting what's happening in my home state. I also want to say, (oh, what did they say?) a shout out is the current expression, a shout out to Alexis Henry, the Work Without Limits program, the University of Massachusetts Medical School, who kind of did a lot of the initial work to get some of the collaboratives funded and supported, and so forth. And she's the one that recommended that we do this. So she's on our Board, so I want to thank her.

There was a little chat that went on about funding the business account managers, and Hugh answered it for Vermont, but maybe Stephanie, you might talk about it a little bit for Massachusetts. Across disabilities, how does that work?

Stephanie: Right. So, so that's really interesting. And the folks at Work Without Limits have been really wonderful, we have a great relationship with them. And that original funding, the Medicaid infrastructure grant, when that Sun settled, we actually wrote a couple of more grants, but then the state agencies stepped up and they really liked the model, particularly the Department of Developmental Disabilities. They were very forward thinking and realized that investing in collaboration was the way to go, that it would really help the folks that they serve, and they didn't want to limit it to the folks with developmental disabilities. So they allowed folks from across every agency to participate. And we also had the Department of Mental Health step up and fund a couple of regions. So you really need buy in from the folks at the state level, or you need to write a grant. But we found, and we've heard from other areas, you really have to have someone, a paid staff person if possible, because there is a lot of coordinating going on. The folks that do these jobs, the project coordinators and the business account managers, they're the link. And when you're dealing with major employers, you need to have seasoned people, and we have just found a lot of the folks that are on my team have strong global human resources and training background. We have a couple of people that have been at the provider level, but that's an investment that we feel that the state, if they can do that, I think folks will be very successful.

Joan: Well, thank you very much, Stephanie, and congratulations on your successes. I believe you also have some Commission for the Blind funding.

Stephanie: Yes, we did the others. Yeah.

Joan: Great. And, so this is very exciting that we can, as they say, work across the aisle, which may not be going too well in the bigger political scheme, but at least it's going well in New England and the disability world. Well, thank you again, Stephanie. We'll get back to you with the questions at the end, okay?

And next we have David Smith from the Sea Coast Mental Health Center in New Hampshire. He's part of one of two, if I understand correctly, there are two teams in New Hampshire: one in Concord and one in Portsmouth, and David is with the southern of those two. And I'll let you get started, David.

David Smith: Okay. Well, hello everybody. It's great to see the number of people that have tuned in to hear about coalitions and collaboratives, and obviously Hugh and Stephanie have covered a lot of the ins and outs of funding, structure for the purpose, the overall purpose. And I think I'm going to just touch on some of those things as we go through. I tried to take some notes, but this also may give you a little bit of a background of where we are now and where we came from in the New Hampshire system. And it mirrors a lot of what Stephanie, you are saying in that it really started when there was some seed money through the Medicaid infrastructure grant. But the way I fell into it, and I really sort of just fell into this, was initially the funding was covering a community of practice for transition, and the opportunity to attack some funds that and focus on employment came up. So when I heard that there was a group of 15, 20 people meeting, talking about how to help people get jobs, I said, why I really want to be at the table for that. When I got to the table, it turned out they're speaking a different language. There's nobody really from community mental health, it's all just schools, and they're talking about kids, and I work in adult services and how does this even fit in? Well even then, it made complete sense because we were talking about helping people with disabilities get jobs, and if it's a 16-year-old or a 62-year-old, the connections and the resources and sort of the concepts were the same. So that went on for a little while. We actually had a facilitator through those funds, and when those funds dried up, we were able to snag a little bit more from the Mid grant, and we had somebody to continue on. And at the time, they were overseeing everything, and I would say maybe four collaboratives, what we called, Workforce Coalitions. And once that money ran out, which was now going on three or four years ago, we each tried in our coalitions tried to figure out a way to maintain it. We did have Voc Rehab at the table at our coalition, so there was a conversation around that. We also did something around the leadership of it, which was people would point to somebody in the room and say, "Well, you're good at this, maybe you can pick this up." The reality is, as I think Stephanie said, it's really awfully hard to coordinate this and do your other work.

And one of the things we also tried in the past what sort of a shared leadership. So I might provide a two month, three months of the leadership and facilitation, which means coordinating events, reminding people that is actually happening on the given day, taking notes, getting those notes out. It doesn't sound like too much, but if you're taking that on indefinitely, it's a little unrealistic, and it creates a scenario where we have right now in New Hampshire, whereas we're not very large as a coalition. We have committed people involved, somewhere around 20 different organizations, and within each organization we have multiple people who will come. But in terms of taking it out and to growing it, creating a contact list like a sales force that Stephanie mentioned, we just don't have the capacity to do that. So we've been running through the lean times without the grant funds and keeping it going. We do

call it a workforce development coalition, and we use that language because we think employers kind of get, "Oh, workforce development," and there's actually, we're one of three right now. There is one in the Lakes Region, which is where the big lakes are in New Hampshire, for people who don't know. We do have one in Concord, and then one in the Seacoast, near Portsmouth. And what's really neat about the collaborative is that they, for us, they go across catchment areas. So anybody's welcome, I'll get to that in a minute. But it's cool, mental health centers, facilities, what we call area agencies, developmental disabilities, businesses. Anybody's welcome to come. And again, the idea is just to promote the employment of people with disabilities. Some of the things that Hugh and Stephanie said, I can't agree with more, is when you bring all these like-minded people to the table, they bring their expertise in different disability areas, and obviously we all have our resource connection. So one of the powerful things is that somebody may be talking about a client they work with who has a visual impairment, but the needs that the employer may match what you're looking for. Or I might get contacted by one of my employers that I work with, and they might say, "I have somebody now who's having trouble with their hearing. They can't afford a hearing aid. I'm not sure what to do. Can you help me out?" And I might say to them, "Maybe I can't, but I know we can," and I'll connect somebody to them, maybe through VR. So that employer's needs are getting met, and when they're getting their needs are getting met in that way, it really can translate into being more open to hear we have to share.

Okay, so I said we serve people across catching areas, and again, that's great because our clients don't live in catchment areas. They move from place to place, and opportunities to drive from one place to another happen. And so I know about opportunities in areas of our region that I might never really have a need to fill, but I might. And so it's kind of works both ways.

One of the things that we did very early on with the group as she said, and part of this goes to, again, Hugh and Stephanie talking about that trust level, working together, feeling confident that the person across from you is going to handle themselves in a professional manner with that employer, is not going to look just for placing people, but making the right match that he actually created a professional practices agreement, and it's a very formal looking document to the point that my CEO said, "I got to take a look at that before she left me to sign off on it." And I think we actually had her sign off on it. Say our organization is committed to following these practices, and they're very basic practices, but if it's something that when new people come onboard, we want them to understand that there's a real rationale for this. And again, the idea is to provide the qualified candidates to employers. Again, that professional agreement helps us to understand each other's roles. But I can tell you that when you're really going month to month with the coalition and you're working together, there's a lot of energy, there's a lot of activity, there's a lot of problem solving.

I like what Hugh said about leads vs. need. When somebody says, and we had a structured part of our agenda is what are the needs? And people will say, "I've been working with this person for x amount of time. I'm not sure where to go now." And just the amount of ideas and enthusiasm that comes out to help that person is worth the price of admission, which there's no price of admission. I'll get to that a minute, but it's that desire to help each other out that's really the reason that people go.

One of the things that is definitely an issue for us, as I mentioned, is that funding. And it's not just the funding where we're sharing the leadership and just trying to do as much as he can with what we have right now. But you may have employment specialists, whatever the title is that they have that could

really benefit from coming to the coalition and really everybody's invited. So whether it's our partners across the river or it's us, we can send a number of people to listen and be a part of the conversation. Many of those staff, the direct line staff, have productivity expectations, billing expectations, whatever it is in your state, and for them to be at the table for an hour and a half, it's hard. They feel like are missing opportunities to be meeting with my clients. And so, we figured out ways to rotate that in, and certainly have somebody like myself at the table, who can bring information back.

The meetings we have are usually an hour and a half once a month, and consistently on the same day, same time. In between that, we use a lot of email lists to communicate between each other sharing job leads that have come up. And even when we've had downtime, where say the month of August, we just traditionally haven't met. Those leads will still come out, you know, "Hey, I just met this great employer. I want everyone to know if you have questions, contact me." Again as Stephanie and Huge said, it's always that initial point of contact person that we go to. So it's that warm handoff. It's, "Hey, I know Dave, but I don't know Fred. "Well, I can make that connection, and I know I can trust you to handle yourself appropriately with that employer and the whole process.

So, one of the things I really have enjoyed about the coalitions that we've been doing is this great opportunity to market. The market basically, the value of hiring people with disabilities. We were talking before the Webinar started that the unemployment rate is so low all around us that that's not as big of a challenge as it used to be. You have employers calling saying, "I need some more people." But we know that won't always be the case. And, so now is the time to connect with as many employers as you can. One of the things that's great, for somebody who's kind of new at this job as an employment specialist or job developer, is to be able to go to an employer and say, "Hi, I'm part of this larger group, and we are here to help you with your hiring needs." Maybe, we have marketing materials that we still have rack cards that have all our organizations on them and some kind of key, a branding of our coalition, and a place where you can pop your business cards. So you're going out saying, "We're part of this larger organization. Here I am." And you can follow up either as an organization yourself or as part of that larger whole. And that really makes employers feel comfortable. And so presenting, I've mentioned street teams, but presenting anywhere you can. We have done presentations at a Rotary chamber meetings, Chamber of Commerce meetings, corporate trainings and job fairs, trade shows; those job fairs where people are walking by, and you're trying to reach out and grab them and say, "Hey, come, come listen to what I have to say." But you have a great audience with the chambers, with Rotary, even training events.

And a couple of things that come to mind. One was we were invited to present what we do and who we are to have a Walmart regional managers' meeting. So we had people from all over New England, and we got half hour to talk about what the coalition is, the value of it, how one call to any of us can help fulfill their needs. And afterwards, if you might imagine, they were coming up to us giving us their card and saying, "I need 20 people in the Seabrook store," or "I wish you guys were around, I'm down over in this area." And so just really cool.

The other times when you're presenting, sometimes it's dispelling myths. I can tell you there are times when we presented, and somebody will raise their hand and so say, "Well, you're from mental health, aren't those people dangerous?" Literally, and it's an opportunity to say, "Well, here's some of the research, and here's the reality." And so I think we're making a difference just by being out there and in

front of people. And you know, again, when you have 20 people that you're a part of, it's a very powerful message to provide to an employer.

Again, sharing those leads with others, if you can't fill them, is very helpful. And I think I mentioned the idea, the powerful idea of, "I don't have the answer, but I can find it." And you know that your colleague who does outreach will follow up right away with that employer and provide them the information they need.

Right now in New Hampshire, we have two of our three coalitions/collaboratives are actively involved with VR, Voc Rehab, I would say it's really, really important to have VR at the table, and I know in Massachusetts and, of course, in Vermont, that is something that's in place. New Hampshire did not have a lot of resources. One of the outcomes of no sales tax, no income tax, is we don't have a lot of resources. So we're always trying to make due. But having VR at the table, just like having them part of your organization around employment for people with disabilities, is key. Sometimes in some states, they made share the profits and be very much involved, like in Vermont, but having them available because, as you all know, sometimes the issue comes up with an employer, and it's nobody you work with, it's not a client, but you can advise them about the resources and support. VR can provide to employers, and so you're making that connection, helping make that need to get addressed. You know, it could be simply accommodations like hearing aids or other items like that. And you're being a resource to that employer, who might otherwise somehow not know how to proceed, and that job might be lost in that space. So again, the whole idea of the coalition is just to, we always go back through helping more people with disabilities get employed.

The last thing I guess I'll say, as I look at my sheet here, is we're getting into the holiday, and I do have a wish list, and I'm sure a lot of you do. You've mentioned some of these things, interesting things about funding. So many of them started with the funding through Medicaid infrastructure grants, which are wonderful when they're around. My belief is that what goes around comes around, and I feel like we're kind of in a dry cell up here in New Hampshire, but we're maintaining it. If you have a coalition that is running, it so important, however you stand. to keep it going because it doesn't take very long for it to start to fall apart. And what we find is people do move on to other jobs. Sometimes the key players on your coalition leave, move out of state, or somewhere else. You have to keep fresh blood coming in, and it's very important. So there's no reason you can't have a grassroots group and just meet, like the old ideas of the mental health center that started in the church basement. I can tell you that even if you're doing something at that level, it's going to make a big difference. And that's all I have.

Joan: Thank you very much. David. I think somebody is typing in a question. , I want to thank all of you. I'll also acknowledge that we have New Hampshire to thank because out of New Hampshire has grown, so many of the evidence-based practices, in particular supported employment. So we want to acknowledge that you're from fertile ground, and not to leave Massachusetts out because we have a lot of firsts. First of this and that. And we'd like to also borrow what from what other people have done and try to mix it up and spread it around. And I'll just say thanks to our sponsors here, and now we can open it up for questions. Either type in the chat box, or you can hit star star and unmute your phone. I think we have a question from Lou Adams to David. You want get that one, David?

David: Can you see that one? I'm not seeing it.

Joan: It says Lou Adams at the very end. Can you see it? It says, "David, you mentioned starting with the community of practice and for those interested in Win Tech has a VRAJC, one-stop business engagement community of practice, and he gives us the website, which is wintech.org/cop. It will do a Webinar on reverse job fairs in January, and he gives us the place to look that up." So that would be interesting, a reverse job fair. I don't even know what that is, but I think I know what it is. I haven't heard it called that before.

David: Well, one of the things that's so great about coalitions is that you can see it in this process. People sharing ideas and resources, their knowledge, and that's really what bringing all the people together. We all have the same common purpose, which is to try to help get people jobs, help people with disabilities get employment, but none of us know it all. So, and some of us forget what we know, so it's always helpful to have reminders and resources.

Hugh: I just want to piggy back on something David said because I think this is an important thing to note around these coalitions. When we pull together and we join forces, our voice in the community is much louder as well, and I'll give a concrete example of this. We had a coalition in our northern part of the state. Transportation is a bear for many of our customers in Vermont, very rural. And we, in our work with employers, we had a large employer up here, Jay Peak, as a matter of fact, which is a large ski area. They were struggling to find workers. And because we had the coalition, we were able to approach our agency of transportation and have a bigger conversation around transportation, how to get workers to that ski area. In fact, it ended up in having probably now we're running about four or five vans a day. So folks don't have to get in their car. They don't have to spend the money, they can ride on these vans. The vans are completely paid for by the company, which is fantastic, and that has since expanded to conversations with other of our coalitions around the state. So by just by virtue of the fact that we're coming together as a group, what triggered this was David's comment about, you know what, when you present to the employer, you say, "I'm part of a bigger group of 20+ organizations. We have a wide pool of candidates for you to choose from." Similarly, we can have those larger conversations around transportation, around retention, around services for individuals in workplaces. So it's a really powerful piece of these coalitions is the fact that rather than each of us singly trying to be heard, and our voice being heard as a small community rehab program, we actually have much more power when we're, when we're expressing those concerns and those considerations to employers when we're doing it as a group. So I just want to make sure I made note of that.

Joan: That's a fantastic example. I also wanted to mention David used the term marketing, marketing, marketing; and it sounds like we also have relationships, relationships, relationships, underlying this.

We have a question from Kathleen Considine. "Do families of your clients get involved in the process with their job seeker?" And I'll let any or all of you answer that. And I'll make a second part of the question is, "What opportunities might there be for families to be involved?" So, who would like to respond? Including you, too, Stephanie, even though we can't see you.

Stephanie: Can you hear me?

Joan: Yeah. Is that Stephanie?

Stephanie: Yes. The answer is families do get involved from time to time. It really depends on the individual that is being served, the agency. We're happy to get families involved because sometimes they know the individual obviously a lot better than others, they might know past history. But none of the folks that work in the collaborative, so to speak, the coordinator, because we don't see clients directly, it would be the job developer or the employment specialists that the family would get involved with. So I just wanted to make that piece clear, but obviously, it's often very helpful to get information from a family member to a job developer or employment specialist on that individual.

Joan: David or Hugh, do you have any comments?

David: This is David. I would just say, what Stephanie said, that in the coalition, it's more of it, other than strategizing around the challenges of placement or something like that. It's more around, looking at the bigger picture. But certainly families with the organization do get involved, and for instance, often family members may go to vocally have to go through the initial, the discussion and be involved in that. But also when I was noticing, and everyone will recognize this I think, but many of our coalition members are family members, if that makes sense. A lot of the folks that I work with and even the employers that come in. And I should have mentioned that we have employers come in and present sometimes on their needs. A hospitality management company come in and say, here's how we hire, here's who you want to talk to you, here's what we're looking for, really amazing. But oftentimes, people will disclose to us because it's pretty powerful when you see this group of people all trying to help promote hiring people with disabilities that people will share that that's something that's in their family as well. So I like to say anybody is welcome to come, and as I say also we're still kind of small. We're hoping to get that funding for leadership that can kind of grow us.

Hugh: I'd like to throw my two cents in, although it may be politically incorrect, but in general, I think family members tend to be a little more behind the scenes in supporting the individual and providing feedback there. Obviously communicating oftentimes with permission with the VR counselor and, but it's much more behind the scenes. I can say in most cases, employers don't really like to have family members involved with the placement itself or once a person is onboard and working, it can actually get a little bit sticky at times. And again, I don't know if this is politically correct, but I'm speaking from my own experience with employers, that in many cases, they prefer not to have too many cooks in the pot, so to speak. They prefer to work with somebody who's their point of contact and it's sort of coordinating things and making sure things are going well, but the minute you start introducing a lot of other people into the equation, it can get pretty confusing pretty quickly, and employers don't have a high tolerance for confusion and disorganization. So that's just sort of my experience around family members, in particular around engaging with employers.

Joan: Yeah, I think if anybody was with us for our last Webinar, Kathleen was the presenter at that particular webinar about what roles family can play in being a positive force for employment. So if anybody didn't enroll on that webinar and would like a copy of it, if you just send me an email, I'd be happy to send you the recording. And I think, I'm guessing Kathleen was talking more about the interaction between the services program and the individual or directly with the individual. But thank you for your thoughts, Kathleen, you're welcome to respond. And Kathleen is a very dynamic advocate for employment services, so I think she may be a thinking of a variety of roles including that of advocate. And I know that I'm in Massachusetts, certainly we have whole groups of employment programs that

would not have existed without family members as advocates, so to either promote them, get them, or keep them.

Hugh: To be clear, I'm not minimizing the impact or the importance of family members at all. I'm just speaking around employers.

Joan: The role with employers is a different situation scenario, yes. Let's see, Kathleen, she was referring to the interaction with the employment services? Yes. Okay, any other questions? We have about six minutes left, so do people have questions or comments? I'd be curious to know if people from other states, not New England, do you have such a kind of sharing collaborative and your state? And I also want to remark that in some research I did about a collaborative, it said that collaborative is not just exchange of information, but it's only a collaborative if you increase the capacity to get services. So I think your definition includes that increased capacity for employment. It's not just an information sharing thing.

I have a question I'll throw out to all of you, and that is, "What is the importance of leadership? And all of you covered it to some extent, but what is the role of leadership and having a successful collaborative?"

Kathleen: That's a great question, Joan. I think it's critical to have leadership and to understand where the employment service providers are. I think people need to know that they need to communicate. The folks that are project coordinators on my team, I tell them all the time, you need to lead, but you also need to develop people in the collaborative to be leaders. So we're constantly doing work on that, and true collaboration really means that people are invested and did they see the bigger picture? So that's something, if it's just an ongoing piece of what we do in it, and you need to bring issues to the surface. I mean, it's just constant.

David: This is David. I think ideally the leadership is consistent, so when you build up that person, the point person and they're there for a while, it really does help build the momentum. The other thing I've noticed when you have a group of 15, 20, however many in the room, over time you can see the leaders, the people who are willing to, "Oh, who wants to go to Rotary in Hampton next month? I will, I will." You know, and what we found too, is not everyone likes to talk in front of people, but they would still come and we'd talk and they'd be there because that was showing the coalition. And so you had a lot of people who will take on projects, who would agree to work beyond the norm if there was something that came up, and then at that point you knew the regulars and that you had a good group building. But I can't say enough for having somebody who is like a business account managers in Vermont, somebody who is, that is their role and they may have other tasks, but one that everyone knows they can go to. I think that's huge and that's ideal, but not essential.

Hugh: This is Hugh. Not to be overly simplistic, but if leadership understands the value of the coalitions, people will come to the coalition meetings.

Joan: Yes, indeed.

Hugh: You have to understand the value and understand that it's a good use of their staff time because there's always this push and pull around really time management frankly for a lot of these programs that are oftentimes short staffed, having people covering other people when they're out sick or whatever. So the pressures on time are really intense. So I think that's an important piece is making sure that leadership truly understands the purpose of these coalitions, what the benefit is to their customers, and what the benefit is to their program.

Joan: Well, I thank all of you, both the participants and the presenters. I think this was a very enlightening and rich webinar, and we will make it available to anyone who wants a copy. I'll send it to everyone who is enrolled, and we'll look forward to listening to it again. And please share it with your friends and neighbors, and feel free to forward it to whomever you wish. So thanks again, and we'll be in touch with Hugh and David and Stephanie, and look forward to more good things happening in the future. We have some people typing in the last minute. Hold on for a second in case it's something important. Just a thank you. Okay. All right. Thanks, from Canada, similar circumstances over here. Okay. Alright, thanks everyone. Onward and upward.

Hugh: Thank you.

Kathleen: Okay, thanks.