

INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES TO EMPOWER YOUTH WITH INTERSECTING IDENTITIES

Presentation Transcript

>> Welcome, and thank you for joining our panel presentation in which we have two wonderful presenters, who are going to share innovative strategies that they are effectively using to empower youth with intersecting identities within the workforce system. And through them, we are going to see that by acknowledging and supporting youth intersecting identities - for example, a youth could identify as lesbian, Latina, and having a learning disability - we can honor and value all aspects of their identities and meet their unique strengths and needs. This panel presentation is being hosted by LEAD Center, which stands for Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities. LEAD is a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act policy development center, and is led by National Disability Institute and Social Policy Research Associates, and funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the US Department of Labour. Next slide. I'm Laura Gleneck with the LEAD Center and it really is my pleasure to welcome our two presenters, Maria and Mark, who are joining us from New York and Hawaii respectively. Maria Lombardi is the disability resource coordinator for the Department of Occupational Resources at Hempstead Works Career Center in New York. And as the Disability resource coordinator, Maria provides various services to job seekers including career counseling and guidance, job search assistance and referrals, résumé and cover letter writing, career assessments and evaluations, and ultimately enrollment into occupational skills training programs. And joining Maria is Mark Menard, who is the WorkHawaii division business services coordinator for the American Job Center with the Department of Community Services in the center in the city and county of Honolulu, Hawaii. Mark finds it rewarding to connect job seekers especially unemployed, underemployed, veterans, youth and homeless individuals with employers. And joining us later in the presentation is Andy Arias, who is a policy advisor with the Workforce Systems policy team at the Office of Disability Employment Policy with the US Department of Labour, and he will help provide closing reflections and remarks about the importance of diversity and inclusion in this work. So let's get started. Next slide, please. Through the panel presentations you're going to learn how you can help yourself or support others to take action and create meaningful policies that positively impact equitable customer practices, support staff in honoring youth intersecting identities to best serve them and how to use best practices and equal opportunity and non-discrimination. Next slide. So Mark is going to share how WorkHawaii's youth programs pandemic-inspired, virtual job site tours have helped rural, Pacific Islander youth with disabilities explore different industries and programs establish formal agreements with businesses for work-based learning experiences for youth. So Mark, I'm going to turn it over to you to share more about this innovative practice and how it is helping to empower rural youth with intersecting disabilities. Mark.

>> Great. Thank you. Aloha everybody. For one thank you very much for having me here. It's great to be able to join everybody from the islands out here in the middle Pacific. My name is Mark Menard, again, and I'm the business services coordinator for the American Job Center Hawaii. Basically, my job here is to assist job seekers connect with employers and vice versa,

helping our business community find people for employment. During the time of COVID, however, I was involved with our youth program, and I was working under a DI grant at the time to help youth with disabilities find employment. The youth program here at the American Job Center is known as a WorkHawaii youth program, and we help youth 16 to 24 years of age, who have some sort of barrier to it education and employment. Most of the participants are youth that have dropped out of high school for whatever reason, and they could be a youth with disabilities, they could be youth that had been involved in juvenile justice system. They've been in foster care, and who are coming from low-income families. So the program offers the chance for somebody who has dropped out of high school to obtain their GED, to get their high school equivalency. But not only that, we really try to take a holistic approach, putting them on a career path. So on top of the academic component, there's also – we also have work-based learning classes. And those classes emphasize job readiness skills and the soft skills that are really important in the workplace. We also have career explorations where they have the opportunity to see what sorts of industries and businesses are offering for employment, occupational trainings that the youth can choose from such as construction, health care, office administration, and customer service. There's also a work experience component where the youth have a chance to gain on-the-job training at a worksite. So you know that kind of first experience working, something to put on a résumé, and also to get some good references. So all these components together layered on top of each other, hopefully, we were able to create a career path for future employment for that youth. So during the pandemic, you know, with all the, you know, the isolation and the social distancing protocols that were in place, a lot of these activities as you can imagine, you know, them being so engaging person to person, a lot of these activities had to be curtailed, and some were actually made not even available. So, you know, one of the things that we really take pride on is that the youth program was one of the first city programs to really come back online, really to start having activities. We actually opened our offices, I think, within the first two months of the shutdown here. So, you know, with the social distancing, and the technologies that were emerging, right, with the virtual technology and the Zoom that was just coming out, you know, as we were trying to get these activities up, we thought, you know, how can we reengage? And how can we use this virtual technology that was growing and being utilized? How are we – how can we take advantage of that, of this new medium and this technology to bring some of our services back online? So that's when we contacted and partnered with the chamber of commerce here, and came up with the virtual career exploration tours. Now us being in Hawaii, in the middle of the Pacific, we have a large Micronesian population, and the Micronesian community is a culture that's very family-centric, where everybody in the family pitches in to help out. This means that, you know, oftentimes the youth are faced with the choice of balancing education with having to get a job to contribute to the family. This also means that a lot – many of the youth, unfortunately, have to drop out. Most come from meager means, and things like computers, laptops, internet connection, hotspots, were just not available to them. So for us to be able to purchase Chromebooks, hotspots to provide for them, you know, these resources really allowed us to stay connected to these youth, and provide the services they needed to create, you know, their own career paths. So with that, you know, I'll let our partners with the chamber of commerce, and [inaudible] Hawaii, which was one of the businesses that we were able to do a virtual tour with, explain how we were able to pull all of this off.

>> My name is Keala Peters, and I'm the Executive Vice President for Education and Workforce Development at the Chamber of Commerce, Hawaii. And so at the chamber, what we do is serve as a work-based learning intermediary for our community. And so what that means is we serve as a bridge between our local businesses and education. Prior to the pandemic, a lot of our work was with our public schools, getting our business community into the schools as guest speakers, bringing the students out for job site visits, setting up internships, but once the pandemic happened, obviously, the schools didn't really have any bandwidth to continue those activities. They were focused on adjusting to remote learning. Meanwhile, the work with [inaudible] youth program had been doing on-site visits to different employers, and needed then to shift and bring in employers to the students virtually. So that's where the WorkHawaii Youth Program reached out to the chamber and asked if we would be able to help them with this shift. Could we find employers to conduct virtual tours for their students who no longer could go on site? And so we've worked with Mark and the folks at WorkHawaii to identify employers who could speak to entry-level positions in their companies in a variety of industries - hospitality, skilled trades and carpentry, retail. So it was a really great opportunity to think about how we could immediately change our delivery method, and be an early adopter with virtual tours. And this was in late March when Mark came to us. And so this was kind of uncharted territory for us. WorkHawaii were our first partners with virtual tours. And so we learned together. There was no shortage of employers who were willing to take an hour out of their time and give a virtual tour to the students. So the hour was structured this way. In the first 20 minutes, the employer partners would give a little background on their business. Sometimes they had a PowerPoint presentation created. They always talked about the different careers, especially entry-level careers that they offered. They also talked about career progression and tried to paint a picture for that career ladder from an entry-level position. We wanted our WorkHawaii youth to see a future for themselves beyond an entry-level position. So we spent 20 minutes doing that. And then using, you know, the iPhone, most of the time, our employer partners would literally take us on a tour. And at a place like we use Hawaii, there was so much to see. So it made for a really interesting tour. But it helped the Hawaii youth feel like they were there on site. And along the way, what they would do, what the employer would do was stop and talk to different employees and highlight their individual career journeys. And so the WorkHawaii youth could understand how in this real-world example, this person, perhaps with a GED, for instance, started in an entry-level position, did good work and progressed in their career into, in some cases, a management position. Another thing that the employers always focused on were the employability skills, sometimes called professional skills or soft skills. What is it that the WorkHawaii youth really needed to make sure they were bringing to the workplace. So we would talk about professionalism. We would talk about promptness and timeliness. We would talk about problem-solving and teamwork. And so we really felt it was important not just to focus on how to do the job, the technical side of things, but really the professional skills that the employers were needing. And then we finished – after that tour, we always finished with a Q&A. And what we found was that if the youth were prepared ahead of time with a question or two, it made for a more engaging Q&A session. And so we learned that as we went along. And then finally, we ended with some resources and links for the youth in case they are interested in pursuing employment or learning more about our employer.

>> Hi. My name is Nat Pak. I'm the workforce development coordinator at Re-use Hawaii. We're a nonprofit committed to reducing waste through deconstruction of buildings and other structures as well as the resale of salvaged material and donated material. Yeah, we were basically asked to do this by Mark Menard. We'd been exploring ways we could work with their new services. So he came by. Quinn, our executive director, we were under fairly strict pandemic restrictions at the time, so he did a walkthrough, a remote walkthrough of our redistribution center. He interviewed several folks at the redistribution center including Jay, the center manager of our – one of our project developers to talk about how we actually develop projects, and how we choose projects for deconstruction, and what we do with the material. And he also talked to one of our receiving managers who receives donations and processes them for resale, as well as our in house craftsmen, which is, I think, probably one of the more inspirational folks for participants because his role is to take salvage material and create custom projects for customers. And I think folks found that very interesting. And certainly when, when we had participants on board, they really enjoyed that part of it, being able to create things out of salvage material.

>> So after each visit, we, of course, circle back with our employers for feedback. And they were surprised at how fun it was. Again, this was new territory for them, so they really enjoyed it. They especially appreciated the chance to interact with the youth and have that Q&A session. Other feedback was that they were interested in pursuing deeper partnerships. So in the case of Re-use Hawaii, we introduced them to the OJT program that WorkHawaii had. And so Quinn at Re-use Hawaii actually progressed on to bring students and youth into his place of business.

>> I was hired to work with the with Workforce Development participants. And at the time, the most – the ones who were on board were recruited through [inaudible]. We had them in various roles. There were several of them working in our processing department. I believe they're up to four were working there at a time. That was processing salvaged lumber, removing nails, damaged materials, trimming it, and inventorying it for sale. We had two participants who were mainly working in our receiving and customer service areas where they would assist with taking in donations, preparing them, bringing them out on the floor, assist customers with loading vehicles, and other things like that. We also had participants who came in and out, and we moved them through various roles. So sometimes they would be working in processing and other times they would be working in receiving or customer service. And we did have one participant for a time who was assisting in our admin department with a lot of – with filing and admin work at that point, and also doing point-of-sale customer service. So I think they came in and there was a variety of roles they filled. I think we were also really feeling it out. At that point, we weren't sure what the appropriate roles would be necessarily. And that's one of the things I did when I came on, that was part of my responsibility was to try and figure out how best to work with our participants. We would probably hire them back if we had the chance and found the appropriate role. But at this point, I think, we were happy to be kind of an assistant – of assistance to them in kind of their journey along to do other things.

>> Wow. That was really great, Mark. I loved what Keala said at the beginning from the chamber of commerce. She said this was a great opportunity to think about how to change our delivery method, and we worked together to make it happen. That's pretty cool. So Mark, before we turn to learn about our next promising practice to support youth with intersecting

identities, I want to ask you if you can talk a little bit more about how this practice has changed the work culture so that you can better serve your community.

>> Yeah. So if you're in Hawaii – you know, everybody – well our community in Hawaii is very much family-centered as it is. I mentioned that the Micronesian community is very family-centered, but you know, if you're in Hawaii, everybody – you've heard the term "ohana" before, right, and everybody's seen Lilo and Stitch, but it really does permeate through our culture here, the sense of ohana, the sense of family, the sense of, you know, taking care of one of each other. So, you know, I think one thing that we learned overall as a community and also here at the American Job Center is this new technology, how great it is, and how we are able to best use it for the greatest good. We all know that there's downsides to technology right now with everybody constantly on the phone, you know. We're walking into, you know, fountains and walking into trees, sometimes when we're on our phones, but, you know, there's that aspect of staying connected. And there's always a yin and the yang to that. But, you know, the, good part, the part that really benefits us as a society, as a community, you know, that's the thing that that we discovered. The pandemic, you know, with the social distancing forced us, right, to stay apart and to isolate. And using this technology, you know, really gave us the opportunity to find new ways to connect again, and to be available for one another, right, to support each other through this uncharted territory. And again, you know, especially [inaudible] we're so remote out here, you know, there's been so many different job opportunities now here, especially with remote work. That's something that's really taken off here in Hawaii. You know, able to work from home and work for a company that's maybe based on the mainland. So, I think that that was the biggest takeaway for us here is learning that, you know, this new technology can be a way to keep us engaged, to keep us [inaudible] a community. You know, it sounds very clichéd, and is used over and over. You know, this, we are all in this together, right, this sentiment. You know, it's never been so true, and really, it never has had to be so true more than ever.

>> Right. Thank you for that, Mark. That's incredible. So if you can go to the next slide, please. So for our next innovative strategy Maria's going to share how HempsteadWorks pioneering staff development trainings have led to LGBTQ plus and disability-inclusive services, language, policies and outreach. So Maria, I'm going to turn it over to you. Next slide, please.

>> Thank you so much, Laura, for that warm introduction. I really appreciate it. I really appreciate being here. I am Maria Lombardi and I am indeed the Disability Resource Coordinator for the HempsteadWorks Career Center, all the way here on the East Coast in New York in Hempstead, Long Island. I'm so glad to be here today to talk to you about the LGBTQ plus inclusive webinar training series that you see before you and that my office first provided for our staff and partners in September and October of 2021. And continues to offer today actually, literally today, as we just held another session of the series earlier today for all of my colleagues and disability resource coordinators in New York State. But before I dive into the what, the how, the policies and [inaudible] practices behind this incredible and truly so important training series, I would first like to share with you a story, a true story, in fact, that comes to us directly from our summer youth employment program just three to four months ago in the summer of 2022. Ladies, gentlemen, I bring you back to July of 2022, right here on Long Island. And as we do every summer and as most, if not all Americans job centers do, HempsteadWorks [inaudible] our summer youth employment

program for youth ages 16 to 20, meeting the low-income eligibility requirements in the town of Hempstead [inaudible] which we serve. The star and the hero of my story is one of the summer youth participants identifying as a member of the LGBTQ community. His intersecting identities also included learning as well as mental health disabilities. The setting, as it happens, is the youth participants worksite in the summer youth program. Moving forward with the story, [inaudible] what was going well at this worksite for our youth participants, him and all his co-workers at their site of business, everything was going very well. Until one day, one day when we received a call from the high school coordinator that referred this youth participant to our summer youth program. She was calling to let us know the situation that had taken place that day at the worksite with this youth participant. And it was not a good one. The youth participant was in his first summer youth experience in our program. It was his first summer with us. And on this day the youth was in distress following an incident where he overheard some disparaging comments being made about the community with which he identified with, the LGBTQ plus community. He was not certain whether the comments were being made directly at or about him, or indirectly at the LGBTQ community as a whole, but one thing was for certain and that is the impact of those words was most certainly felt by him. He was traumatized. It was a conversation that he overheard around him and that had impacted him in the worst possible way. He was in such distress. For us, what mattered most to us, at this point, was not the logistics of how and why the comments were made. That didn't matter to us so much. And what mattered most was that they were made, and that they were heard by him. What mattered to us most right now was his mental and emotional health. What mattered was the pain and the hurt, that was real, no matter what, no matter how you define or describe the situation. We immediately mapped out a plan. By we, I mean myself, our youth services coordinator, the high school coordinator who referred him to our program as well as his school psychologist and staff that had been assisting him throughout the school year. We mapped out a plan to remedy the situation and make things right for him, make him well. We wanted him to heal from the words he heard, while also making this a teachable lesson and a life lesson for his co-workers, including those that spoke the words, as well as his supervisors at the worksite. This was an important moment, and we wanted to take advantage of it. It was important to take this moment to teach everyone involved how important and impactful their words can be. And that even if you say something, something that you may think is innocent, that you really didn't intend to hurt anybody, the truth is that those words you speak may not be innocent after all. The words you speak can cause a deep and often irreparable pain and distress to someone else, as they did here. It was so important to take this moment to truly teach sensitivity, diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and mostly kindness to one another. And that's what we did. That's exactly what we did. In the end, let's fast forward to the end of the summer, to the end of the summer youth program. I am so glad to say that this youth stayed at his worksite. He stayed, and he worked alongside those same co-workers, earning his \$16/hr salary while building his confidence, his soft skills, his work-readiness skills, and strengthening his emotional well-being back to where it belonged. He was emotionally strong, and well enough to finish out his summer work experience. The experience that he had earlier on in the summer with the co-workers and the comments that he overheard had not broken him. I'd like to say that our help, with our help, we strengthened him. The experience allowed him to cope and to heal from an experience that he had just, in a very short six-week period, in a six-week program. He quite likely might have such an experience again at some point in his lifetime, though, hopefully not. Sadly, I would

like to share a statistic with you taken directly from the pages of the LGBTQ-inclusive series I'm going to talk about today. And that is a statistic. That statistic, 58% of LGBT employees reported hearing derogatory comments about their sexual orientation and gender identity in their workplace. So that's 58. That's a huge number. And this was just one example of that statistic. Okay. And now can we move onto the next slide, please. Onto the topic that brings me here today, the LGBTQ plus inclusive webinar training series that my office HempsteadWorks provided for our staff last year. And as I mentioned a short while ago continues to offer today. I'll be discussing the webinar series and the LGBTQ and disability intersectionality. Intersectionality is described by the ADA as a way of making visible the unique experiences of multiply-marginalized people. According to the ADA National Network, when we take an intersectional approach, we acknowledge that every person has multiple identities, which together shape their everyday experiences of systemic oppression and/or privilege. In addition once disability intersects with other marginalized identities, such as being female or an immigrant, that is when a person faces additional types of oppression. My career, at HempsteadWorks Center again in 2008 as a career counselor, and now I'm a disability resource coordinator through two rounds of the Disability Employment Initiative Project, the same as Mark Menard, in 2014 and 17. Having worked in this field of disability and workforce development as the disability resource coordinator, I can tell you that my experience strongly echoes the words of the ADA. I can tell you that the intersectional approach is the most effective way to meet people where they are, and connect with them to identify their challenges, their goals, and needs, and ultimately finding opportunities for them. Individuals with disabilities have many identities and one of them is, or can be, identifying as a member of the LGBTQ plus community. At HempsteadWorks, it is our mission, it's centered on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the workforce system. As part of this mission, in 2021, we've partnered with John Shadrach from Gen Tech Consulting to offer this four-week training program for our staff, and partners, and local service providers. The training series was developed to ensure that our career center and the staff that work in it are fulfilling HempsteadWorks' mission on diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility. We wanted to ensure that all youth, and young adult participants, and community members identifying with this community are always treated with D-E-I-A, along with the dignity, respect, and understanding, and care that they deserve. Our mission at HempsteadWorks is that we should always be an inclusive and accessible space for all job seekers, and the identities that represent who they are. And if there's one thing about where my office is located, if you know Hempstead at all, most of you probably do not, I could tell you that we're located in the largest township in the United States, but also that we're in the heart of a very culturally diverse and largely underserved community. This community is truly a melting pot of cultures and people from all over the globe, a community filled with so many people with so many intersecting identities. Along with this culture and the diversity, you will find that Hempstead is also home to a large number of helping agencies, community- and faith-based organizations, many of which are our partners. Okay. In early 2021, HempsteadWorks management decided, along with our New York State, Department of Labour State [inaudible] heading the DEI project to bring this LGBTQ-inclusive training series to our partners and staff and our community. It was time for a positive change for the LGBTQ community, and it was time for us to learn how we could be at our best and do our best to make all the individuals identifying with this community and their intersecting identities to feel welcomed by us all. On your screen - thank you - you will see – you saw a short while ago directly from casecenter.org website, what each word stands for in the LGBTQIA abbreviation.

In addition, you can always reference GLAAD, the LGBTQ media reference guide for more detailed information. That GLAAD is the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. Next slide. What you see before you is a series of description of inclusive webinars [inaudible] that. That's it right there. Thank you. I think it's the next slide. Gen Tech. Oh, that's okay. Let's just stay right here. It's fine. It's fine. What we just said before you know or previously with the series description for our inclusive webinar series with Gen Tech Consulting. What you saw previously was that the LGBTQIA clients face many barriers and inequities related to the sexual orientation and/or gender identities. For those of you that have worked with these clients or have friends and family members in this community, you most likely already know. You probably know this without doing any research to support this fact. If you have any experience personally or professionally with members of this community, you know that this is the fact; there are inequities and there are challenges that they face every single day. The barriers and inequities are very real, and that is the reason why HempsteadWorks took on this mission to offer LGBTQ plus inclusive training to our staff and partners in order to truly meet people where they are. You need to be able to understand the specific needs. And the inclusive webinar series discussed the strategies that we, as professionals in our field, can use to ensure professional and program efficacy, and an affirming, and a welcoming environment. Much too often you hear stories in the news media and social media about the inequities members of the community face from discrimination, to violence and even hateful crimes. As service professionals, we must always strive to provide a welcoming environment for the people we serve, especially our youth who are so young and still growing and coming into their own identities. This [inaudible] every member of our community, from every background, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, disability, or no disability. As a professional I've learned – I've heard from one too many members of the LGBTQ community about the inequities they face in their lives. HempsteadWorks offered this training series to actively improve our capacity to serve this community and to always make them feel welcome in our center. I once heard a story, this is going back to my DEI experience, my Disability Employment Initiative grants – I heard a story about a young individual identifying as LGBTQ, who was turned away from a service provider when they reached out for help. This individual was turned away without any offer of support for services or additional resources anywhere. Simply just turned away. We can't help you. I knew that this could never and should never happen in our center by any of our staff. Luckily, this youth sought and received help elsewhere where he was treated with respect and the care that he deserved. This is a happy ending to this particular story Because he certainly wasn't distressed, and also because this young man, who was a member of already a marginalized community was also dealing with a mental illness, the secondary reason why he was seeking help, which made it doubly important for him to get immediate care, and it made it that much harder to hear this story. How could anyone have turned him away? How could anyone? We extended this inclusive training series invitation to our partners to further build capacity in our local region, with our partners, training providers, and other local community agencies throughout Long Island. The training series is currently being provided as a fit for our DRC within New York sign-on grant. The system has changed and it includes opportunities network grant for all the DRCs in New York State. We know that there's an increasing number of individuals in the LGBTQ community visiting our centers and need our services. And we knew that it was imperative to provide this training to educate and inform our staff, and our partners, which would overall [inaudible] all of our service delivery for this community. This training series helped to bring us one step closer to further embracing DEIA and also understanding how

important an intersectional approach is when serving our clients. As you've seen here in the slide, we did have staff sometimes raising questions or expressing uncertainty about how to properly address and serve individuals and its community. And as an agency, you have to stop and listen. When your staff are asking questions, they're, in essence, showing how much they care about their client. It was our responsibility to answer their call and to offer this training series to them. What are some of the lessons learned? Let us move on to, if we can, this right here. That's the perfect slide. Thank you. What are some of the lessons learned? Well, what we learned is number one - hat it means to be part of the LGBTQ community as well as the number two, the social and cultural challenges faced by this community, and the inequity that they face each and every single day in their workplace, and in their professional lives. And then there's number three, they have [inaudible] points of setting aside our biases, and our prejudices, and truly embracing diversity, equity, inclusiveness and accountability. Jumping back to the story I shared with you the beginning of my presentation, we can never forget the importance of meeting our youth participants where they are. Next slide, please. Thank you. Stopping the clock, so to speak, to address the here and the now, addressing their challenges and struggles at that moment and on that day. Addressing challenges, learning how to cope, and overcoming difficult situations, eliminating barriers, and helping them to move forward on their journey to improving their lives and achieving their dreams and goals. Meeting participants where they are also included for us during this relatively short six-weeks summer youth program that I keep talking about, is partnering with our local partners to support another youth participant identifying as transgender. She, herself, was dealing with her own challenges coming from a family that was not accepting the woman that she was today. She, too, was dealing with a mental illness. In fact, in one phone message that I received back from the family power following a message that I left for her when I tried to reach her on her voicemail, or what I thought was a voicemail, I received a call back on my voicemail firmly telling me that she, giving me her name, did not live at that address. She did not live at that home. Please do not leave a message again. Pretty powerful, pretty impactful for me. We are keeping the momentum going. Next slide, please. Here at HempsteadWorks, by expanding the workshop series to our summer youth employment program for the participants, ages 16 to 20, and the businesses that employ them – using that story, again, at the top of my presentation with the youth [inaudible] and the disparaging comments, we don't want that situation to happen again. So we're bringing the series towards the summer youth program 2023. And all the businesses, all the youth will participate in this training to really, you know, gain some insight, in the DEIA along the way. This decision really was made right after that story, right after that happened. We plan on implementing ongoing training and awareness for all of our staff and our partners by offering this training now and in the future. And as I mentioned earlier, again, we're offering it to our DRC - just keeping the momentum going and helping to make a change, a positive change for this community and all the intersecting identities that our participants, our youth participants come to us with. Next slide. I will end my presentation with some resources from the LGBTQ inclusive series, including some resources here on Long Island, all the way out of the GSA Network nationally. And for those of you that are not aware and aren't familiar with, the GSA Network is the Gender and Sexualities Alliance. And before I hand this presentation back to Laura, I want to take a moment to say to our youth, and this is what I say to our youth, all the time, almost every day, I speak to them. I listen to them, and I put my faith in them, that they are the here, they are the now – and to use their voices. Speak loudly, be heard, be confident. Make the

change in this world. Make the changes that we need to make our tomorrows and our future a better one. And always to practice DEIA and really be that for one another, accepting one another for who we are. And, Laura, I'd like to hand it back to you. Thank you.

>> Wow. Thank you for that, Maria. That's really moving. I love how both you and Mark really touched on community - while you made the statement that sharing the intersectional approach allows you to meet participants where they are. That's what both you and Mark are doing. I really, really appreciate. I was going to ask you the same question as Mark, but I think he really answered it about how this practice has changed the work culture so you better can serve your community better. I like how you said at the beginning, that started in HempsteadWorks, but now it's been shared state-wide. And I hope through that - today's presentation, that there will be others who want to learn about this as well. So thank you. We can go to the next slide please, and then the slide after that. To provide closing remarks about the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility in American job centers and practices share today, from Mark and Maria, and serving youth with intersecting disabilities, we're really glad that Andy Arias is with us today from the Office of Disability Employment Policy. I'd like to just say a few words about Andy. He works on a number of federal policy initiatives focused specifically on WIOA implementation and economic advancement for individuals with disabilities. He works across government agencies to align policy in supporting WIOA implementation. He has focused on economic empowerment for underserved communities for the majority of his career. He is an adjunct faculty from Georgetown University. His area of focus is diversity and inclusion from the LGBTQ plus disability perspective. And his background and expertise from the national, state and local levels has helped her support national technical assistance activities around implementation of the US Department of Labour-funded disability employment demonstration projects and one of them being Disability Employment Initiative, which both Mark and Maria were part of. So Andy, thank you for being part of this panel. And I'm going to turn it over to you to share your reflections on today's panel and thoughts on diversity and inclusion.

>> Thank you so much, Laura. First of all, I'd like to thank Mark and Mark Maria for sharing your passionate work with all of us. It really shows how connectivity and how on-the-ground work can really create the systemic change. We, at the national level, use examples like these to guide us in our larger policy work. And I think that what you're speaking in terms of the connectivity, and the needing for interdependence within your communities to create that change is only going to increase as we enter this new workspace, right, whether it be full-time remote work for individuals with disabilities or youth with disabilities, that interconnectivity is going to be so important for them to move forward. One of the things that I identify as, and I'll describe my background a little bit. I'm wearing a collared shirt that's magenta, and a sparkly background. And the reason I use a sparkly background, even in my federal professional workspace is because I like to identify myself sometimes as a unicorn because I am LGBTQ Latinx and significantly disabled, I have CP. So everything that Mark and Maria were discussing, in this presentation today, sort of hit home for me as a professional, but also as an individual with a disability. I have faced many of the barriers and challenges that both of you spoke about, whether it be the discrimination that I hear in passing, right; the biases that are in the tones of people that speak to me in previous jobs or situations that I've been in, and the lack of connectivity that I've had within the workforce

system before my time at ODEP. So all those things were so impactful to me. I had to stop myself from getting a little emotional when I was hearing the stories about the transgender youth, and the youth that was being impacted by the trainings, I think that all of what the work that you're doing is not only so important, but it is sustainable for other workforce systems to be able to do, because what you're doing is connecting and creating bridges for other entities to come together and say, let's work. You know, let's create a community, for our members, who are LGBTQ and disabled. Intersectionality, for me, is not just a title on a slide. It's not a talking point. It's my lived experience, and it's the lived experience of many people with disabilities. So I think we can only move forward from here. There's a statistic in the Washington Post that says, "One out of six Gen X individuals identify as they are on the queer spectrum." Now we add that to the one in four individuals that identify with disabilities and that number is only going to increase as time goes on. So this work on intersectionality of identities, whether they be LGBTQIA, disabled, or other people in the workforce, only has to increase. We have to work together as a community to be able to make these systemic changes. And I know that most of you – you know, this took time to develop to cultivate those relationships, and to get those trainings, and those connections made. But it wasn't impossible. It was doable, tangible steps. And that's what I would like to leave everyone with today. These steps are doable; they're tangible. They're not pie-in-the-sky thoughts. They're ideas and movements that you can put forth in your community. There's leadership at every level in the workforce system. So whether you're someone at the front desk, or someone that's a supervisor or a manager, there's things you can do to put these activities in place. And I just want to thank you both, again, for your passion, your motivation. Really what you guys put forth in your local areas or states is what we use as our templates for policy. So with that, I want to say thank you again, and send it back over to Laura.

>> Thank you, Andy. Next slide, please. I'll just ditto what Andy said, and really special thank you to Maria and Mark and the work that you're doing to address intersectionality and build a more inclusive and accessible workforce system for all youth, especially those at the intersection of disability. And as Andy mentioned, your practices that are creating bridges, connectivity, and interdependence, thank you for allowing us to learn from you. The next two slides includes some tools and resources that we encourage you to check out to help you in your path. And Sarah, if we can move beyond those to the next few slides to the LEAD Center. No. Go down, please. Thank you. No. Thank you. And be sure to check out the LEAD Center's website where you can find a very robust library of resources, including national best practices, and equal opportunity, and non-discrimination. We also encourage you, if you are not already, to sign up to receive information, and notifications, including our newsletter, that includes information about future and past events and promising practices from the field. The next slide. And here are some additional ways that you can connect with us. The LEAD Center posts on our social media on a weekly basis. So if you are not already, please get connected. And if you see something that you're interested, please re-tweet. Please share posts with your networks and encourage them to follow the LEAD Center. And the final slide. We really, on behalf of the LEAD Center and the Office of Disability Employment Policy, thank you for joining today's panel presentation on innovative strategies to empower youth with intersecting identities. We really hope that through today's presentation you have a better understanding of how these proven, effective practices can help you honor and value all aspects of youth identities and meet their unique strengths and needs. Thank you.