

# Partnerships to Support Successful Customized Employment

## Transcript

July 25, 2023

NANCY BOUTOT: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to Partnerships to Support Successful Customized Employment. We will give it one minute to let everyone come on in, and then we will get started.

Good afternoon to those of you just joining us and welcome to Partnerships to Support Successful Customized Employment. We will get started in about 30 seconds. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to Partnerships to Support Successful Customized Employment. You are at the right webinar today, July 25.

The LEAD WIOA Policy Development Center is led by National Disability Institute and is fully funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor.

Next slide.

Hi, I am your moderator Nancy Boutot. I work for the LEAD WIOA Policy Development Center and National Disability Institute. Next slide. We have a couple of housekeeping tips for you. First of all, captioning: if you wish to personalize the captioning, you can click on the live transcript button on the Zoom panel. And find the live captions option, or you can adjust your caption size under the subtitle settings option.

Alternatively, you may open a captioning webpage in your new browser and click the link posted in the chat box. So we will put that link in the chat box. And to adjust the

background color or text color and font, you can use the drop-down menu at the top of the browser. Position the window to sit on top of the embedded captioning. Next slide. And if you have any questions on content, click on the Q&A button and type in your question. We have got individuals that can assist you there. And if you've got any tech support questions, type your questions in the chat box, and we will have someone help you there. Next slide please.

Well, it is my privilege and honor to introduce Rose Warner to do our welcome and our opening remarks. Rose is a Senior Policy Advisor for Workforce Systems Policy Team at the Office of Disability Employment Policy, otherwise known as ODEP, with the U.S. Department of Labor. Rose, I will turn it over to you.

ROSE WARNER: Thanks, Nancy, and greetings everyone. As Nancy said, I am Rose Warner, and I am a Senior Policy Advisor at ODEP. I also serve as the Federal Project Officer for the WIOA Center. On behalf of the Department of Labor, welcome to our webinar. As a self-description: I am a white woman with shoulder-length, curly brown hair. I wear purple glasses. And today I am wearing an orange dress with big purple flowers.

My background is an authentic Colorado backdrop, featuring many mountains and trees. It is such a privilege to be speaking with you today, during a very important week in the disability community. Tomorrow marks the 33rd anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act. In addition to welcoming you today, I will also review the objectives of today's webinar. As I do, I will highlight resources that you can look into after the webinar.

LEAD colleagues, can you please insert these resources into the chat as I mentioned

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them? Next slide.

Our first objective of today's webinar is to identify a variety of approaches to achieving customized employment outcomes through partnerships. When I think of this objective, I think of the blending, braiding, and sequencing joint communication and FAQ that ODEP, along with 8 other federal agencies, released last year.

These innovative funding strategies may be useful as you consider implementing Discovery and Customized Employment. The second objective is to implement Guided Group Discovery, adapted as needed to the clientele, through partnerships. For this objective, I would recommend the Guided Group Discovery training materials we specifically created for youth and veterans.

Our third objective is to explore funding options and ways to blend, braid, and sequence resources across systems. I already mentioned the blending, braiding, and sequencing joint communication and FAQ; in addition to those resources, we also held three webinars last year demonstrating examples of blending, braiding, and sequencing.

The fourth objective is to discuss success stories about people who have benefited from Customized Employment, including how it worked and why it was important, from the perspectives of the jobseeker, employer, and employment staff. For this, I recommend a few videos we developed about veterans who benefited from Customized Employment. These videos are called Customized Employment Works for Veterans: A Job that I Love and A Win-Win Strategy.

If you prefer to read, we also have a Customized Employment Works for Veterans Brief, featuring five veteran stories. As I conclude my remarks, I want to acknowledge that it is Disability Pride Month. Although I have been legally blind for my entire life, I did not

always have disability pride. I only gained pride in my disability after spending an entire summer of career development with other disabled young adults.

This building pride is incredibly important because it is-- disability pride is incredibly important because it is about being proud of who I am and all that comes with it, including my disability. It is about recognizing that while my disability does not define me, it is a part of my human experience.

Reframing disability as an asset instead of a liability changed my entire outlook and took a huge weight off my shoulders. Having a good job can accomplish this too. So I want to personally thank all of today's speakers for helping empower people with disabilities through employment. Finally, tomorrow is not the only big disability policy celebration this year. On September 26, we will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Rehabilitation Act.

The theme for the Rehabilitation Act anniversary is advancing access and equity then, now, and next. Right after the Rehab Act anniversary is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which is celebrated every October. Going along with the Rehabilitation Act anniversary theme, the theme this year is Advancing Access and Equity.

We can't wait to hear about the celebrations you all are planning. Thank you again for being here today, and thank you in advance to our speakers for sharing their stories with us. Thanks also to the LEAD team for correlating today's webinar. That is all the announcements I have for today. Nancy, I will pass it back to you.

NANCY BOUTOT: Thank you so much, Rose. I appreciate that. Thank you for describing yourself. You made me realize I did not do that. My description kind of

sounds like yours: I am a white woman with curly brown hair and purple glasses. I am wearing a brightly colored top. Thank you for that. Also, I just want everyone to know I saw the question, “Will we have access to this PowerPoint?” in the chat. You will. It will be up on the LEAD Center website within the next week and a half to two weeks. You will have access to that.

You will also get an announcement when it comes out. Also, I see some links are going into the chat that are not working. Don't worry. We will get that worked out, and even if we don't get it worked out during the webinar, all of the links are in the presentation that you will be getting in the next week and a half to two weeks. So thank you for that.

I am thrilled to introduce to you our esteemed speakers that we have today. First is Toni DePeel. She is the Pre-Employment Transition Service, or Pre-EST, Coordinator for the state of Oregon. Wendy Parker is the Manager of Postsecondary Transition in the Division of Specialized Instruction's Office of Teaching and Learning at the District of Columbia Public Schools.

Jhiya Cooper is a former Guided Group Discovery participant. Jhiya is currently working at Marshall's, and she is actually one of the first Guided Group Discovery group participants in the D.C. public schools. We also have Tikeya Milburn with us. She is the Project Manager for Transition Services at D.C. Rehabilitation Services Administration at the D.C. Department of Disability Services.

Before we hear from our speakers, I wanted to give a quick overview of Customized Employment. What is Customized Employment? Customized Employment is for an individual with a significant disability that is based on individualized determination of

strengths, needs, and interests.

It is designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer. So it is a great match, and it is carried out through flexible strategies. That is taken from Section 7 of the Rehabilitation Act as amended by WIOA. Next slide please.

So why use Customized Employment? Well, there are several reasons. First, it supports people with barriers to employment to attain their employment goals when traditional strategies just aren't succeeding for that individual. It also assists in the implementation of ongoing supports that promote employment retention that some individuals may need. Next slide please.

So where does Discovery fit into this process? Well, Discovery is actually the first step in a Customized Employment process or journey. Discovery seeks to find who a person is right now, what their interests and preferences are, what their skills and contributions are, and what their conditions of employment may be. As we all know, there may be conditions to make our employment what we want.

Lastly, it is used to match a jobseeker to an employer's needs. We can go on to the next slide. There are several components of a customized approach, and that includes Discovery, which is basically gathering information about that person. As we just talked about before, we are thinking about interests and contributions and skills.

Then the next part is a profile, which we also call an Employment Blueprint. So that blueprint is a written summary of what was learned during the Discovery process. I will talk about that in a little bit more detail in a few slides. But that written summary can then be brought to an employment meeting on Customized Employment where a plan

for employment can be developed.

Another component to the customized approach is informational interviews and networking, so discovering employment and community needs. And then lastly proposing or negotiating employment opportunities for that individual. We can go on to the next slide please.

One of the things I really love about Customized Employment is it circumvents a comparative approach to employment. We know that most individuals with significant barriers to employment can sometimes be deemed as “unemployable.” So what we see as a traditional job development approach includes things like vocational assessment, resume development, practicing interviews, responding coldly to job ads, or just your standard filling out an application and an interview. The comparative approach, the customized approach, is what we are talking about.

It includes Discovery and developing a profile, which could include a portfolio, pictures, even a video resume where someone could show off their skills to an employer. Then the other part of the customized approach is informational interviews and connections. So rather than practicing interviewing with a staff and then going out and actually having a live interaction with an employer, which can be difficult at times, we do something called “informational interviews” where a person who is looking for a job can meet with employers and just talk to them about what their employment or place of employment offers individuals.

Then the other thing that customized employment does is match skills to the employer needs. Then we help people put together employment proposals that they can then put toward the employer to try to finalize that employment and get the job. We can go on to

the next slide. There are several Discovery formats: facilitated, self-guided, and guided group. I won't go into those in any detail because you will get all of the links to all those in the resources. I want everyone to know right now that all of these resources have so many different products for you to use. They've got PowerPoint presentations, a facilitator's guide, and student workbooks—really everything you need to be able to implement Discovery in a place of employment. Next slide please.

Whether we are looking at any of the forms of Discovery, they pretty much come down to the same thing, which is a job search team or a group of people that the person can rely on for job related advice, support, and feedback. Nobody works well in a silo. Part of Discovery is getting information from family, friends, teachers, and, if somebody is a use in school, counselors, neighbors, or whoever they might want on their team to help them to get the job that they want. Next slide.

And the Discovery process leads to the Blueprint for Employment that I was talking about earlier. So the blueprint summarizes what somebody learns when they are going through that Discovery process, and it provides the person with a structure that they can take to their first or second or third, or tenth step toward employment, whatever it maybe. None of us have had just one job in our lifetimes. I know myself; I've had many. Discovery leads to the blueprint, which leads to the job search plan, which leads to the action and of course the final action is actually having that person obtain a job.

And having said that, I would now like to turn the presentation over to Toni DePeel, again from Oregon. She was part of the original pilot project for Discovery that National Disability Institute and the LEAD Center did with the state of Oregon back in 2018.

The amazing thing that she will talk to you about is... we all know that in 2020 the



pandemic happened, but she and her team kept Discovery going in the state of Oregon by changing the materials to make sure that they worked virtually. With that, I will turn it over to you.

TONI DEPEEL: Hello, my name is Toni DePeel, and I'm here from the great state of Oregon. I am a middle-aged woman with shoulder-length hair, a little bit of gray flakes inside of that. I work in Oregon under the position title of Pre-Employment Transition Service Coordinator. When I began this job in 2017, there were two of us, and now of course, we are expanding and working with a lot of students throughout the whole state. The map you are seeing is our state of Oregon to the right on the side. For the initial project that happened here in 2018, we were piloted with six different areas in the state. We have what is titled a transition network facilitator in the state of Oregon, which is a grant-funded position, partly with the Oregon Department of Education and partly funded through Vocational Rehabilitation (my position, along with support specialists). So we have this working network throughout the whole state. So we all came to a training initially and learned about the Guided Group Discovery project and how we could implement it throughout the whole state in different schools.

I was not part of the mentoring project, but I was trained when we had someone that had to leave and got a new position. So then, I was added into the initial project, and I worked with a local high school transition specialist. I mentored her through the whole training process, and she gave the curriculum and worked with students at the school that she was at.

It has been evaluated, and we have added many more people. It is still continuing in Oregon, and I am excited to bring a little information today on how I took it, along with

my coworker at that time, Terry Brown. We took it and changed it up so we could continue to use it during COVID-19. Next slide, and we will get into that.

This is just how we said, “Hey, this is what we are going to do. We will continue.” We knew we had to keep teaching during COVID-19, and we wanted to ask the Vocational Rehabilitation program to be able to continue offering pre-employment transition services.

We marketed it a little bit out to the schools where we had already met staff and teachers, and then also during the summer, I was able to work with several groups throughout the whole state offering this curriculum. Yes, in a very different way because it was virtual. Giving experiences about Discovery. As you can see through the site, we try to connect with those five key areas there: What is work? What are tasks? What are my strengths? What type of work do I want to do? What type of employers do I want to work for? And then, learning about networking and industries and more and more and more. I will go ahead and say, “Go to the next slide.”

So being able to help students engage virtually was not easy. Many of you probably remember the whole Zoom squares, everybody popping in and out. But many did not want to turn the cameras on. We started at the very beginning of our lessons getting them to engage: learning a little bit more about who they are, what their interests are. Some students had worked already, but this was just really similar to what you might call an icebreaker, just getting them into the thought process and drawing them in to think about work. Next slide.

This is a little about me because I find if I'm willing to share about me, they are more willing to share about who they are. And nothing better than sharing what your pets are,

right? These are my dogs. I really enjoy my animals. I think students can relate to that, and that is really what we are trying to do. My position with Vocational Rehabilitation; I am a Pre-ETS Coordinator, so I am not assigned to just one school. That is what is different about my role. We had teachers in schools doing the program, but in my role, I'm going in and out, so I have to try and make connections with the students.

Next slide. I am checking my own notes here at the same time.

This is probably one of my favorite projects of this part of the curriculum. It is to let the students think a little bit about "Here I am right now. What are my hopes and dreams? What is my interest?" And we did this also virtually. We had the students draw, and they held it up to the screen. But now that we are back in person, I just finally did a class, and I really did continue to use the slides I had developed during COVID-19 because I felt like with this particular student that it was a good placeholder. A lot of visuals and things that can keep them engaged. An idea to do exercises you have them do in class. Have them sit down, get out the colored pencils, markers, and things they enjoy.

Another idea: we used a document camera. So the whole idea with students is trying to give them more self-advocacy skills. Anytime they can feel more comfortable being in front of people, getting up, and talking about themselves a little bit. Sharing what their hopes and dreams are with other people. And then when we bring in employers and have them meet people they don't know, they are a little bit more at ease.

Some things we wanted them to consider were "Where are you going to live? What kind of work do you want to do? And what are the things that you might want to have when you become an adult?" Thinking a little more like that. This is one project in the curriculum. Next slide.

Oh, yes. This is one of the worksheets, and of course it is not the full worksheet; it is just a part of it. During COVID-19, worksheets worked well because we gave the students something that they could relate to when we were doing presentations. So, we took some time, and made some worksheets to work with the students. They were either sent it ahead of time, and the teachers uploaded them, or many had Google and used it that way. Also, in person, we may use these worksheets to give them an extra activity to do.

This one was from lesson one, “Why work?” Next slide.

We also wanted to include some videos, and I am not going to play this video. But you are probably well aware of the different deals that are used through the national One-Stop system.

Kids always enjoy... Here is another animal video. Trying to keep it mixed up so they had different interests in the videos. So we didn't just use animal videos; we added this because one of the things during COVID-19 is we couldn't have visitors. So we had to think about the resources we could do to introduce them to their local One-Stop Center. Next slide.

Oh, it almost played for you. Sorry about that. One of the things we wanted to make sure that we included was “What about you? What kind of environments do you like?” Really, this is a really good discussion. One of the things that I like to do in person is have a running chart paper. Students start thinking about what they like and don't like, but I also am documenting that. It really is encouraging to other students when they see that other people have the same thoughts. We make checkmarks, and I will circle with

different colors to add. I want say we already have that there. I want to make sure they know that we are hearing their voice also and by including them in that way: open discussions about environments. It is interesting to hear what the students will say what they don't like and what others they seem to care for. That is always a fun thing. I like to leave the chart paper when I have a classroom and I am going in and out. I will leave it with the teacher so the teacher can go back to that throughout the week. I may only come once a week, but the teacher can go back. They can talk about it during class if there is some time they want to do that. It allows for enforced and reinforced learning. Next slide. Just a moment I want to make sure I'm getting my notes I wanted to talk about.

This is a piece about the curriculum that talks about skills and tasks. Many students don't think about a job description and being able to break it down. They might think about "Here is the job description," but not understanding that "these are the skills and the knowledge that I need to have." This is the piece of work in a task, but also there is a great thing if you would like to do it. And I checked the last time I had a student allergic to peanuts so we made a jelly sandwich. But what are the tasks? How do you break things down? That is a lot with Discovery., understanding that not all students will be able to perform a task 100%, but what are the pieces that they know about that they can do? Just the understanding of breaking down job descriptions and tasks. So make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich if you want to ensure that.

I want to check my time. How are we doing here? The next slide talks about vocational themes. Taking a look at what are the different jobs. Maybe what family do they all go with? So you might have a student that says, "I am very interested in becoming a

nurse." Well, what are the other jobs in that family? You know, just talking a little bit more in depth. Being able to help them take a look at maybe not just the one job that they are thinking about, but what are some of the other things within that zone. What are the vocational themes? Working on that. And next slide.

This one in particular gives an example of what we would use with some pictures, right? So remembering that we did this a lot virtually. I have printed these things also to work in classrooms to give a little bit more hands-on activity. Checkboxes, those are easy. Next slide.

One of the things that we did that I wanted to mention is we have added a strengths card, and those can be found very easily on the Internet. Thinking about what your strengths are when you're getting ready to do like a networking pitch: What are some of the things that I need to do and talk about and understand about myself when I go to do the piece about networking? Who do I know? Who is going to be on my job search team? How can I share a little bit about myself? So what we will do is a strengths card with the students so they can start speaking to what their strengths are.

Another activity that we have done before is after they decide on their strengths, pair them up and then have them talk to each other about their strengths and share back and forth. Much like you would in a job interview. And ask that question, "Can you tell me about yourself?" Adding more self-advocacy, working as a team, mixing that up, and having them work with other students too. So that is the end of that slide.

NANCY BOUTOT:

Wonderful, wonderful thank you so much, Toni. Great information. Before you go, you mentioned something... A certain camera. You had the picture of the handwritten pencil

picture. Can you tell us what the camera is that you're talking about?

TONI DEPEEL: It is called a document cam, used to display a piece of paper. I think we just used to call them filmstrip projectors. These used to be big machines that you would wheel in on a cart and slide a microfilm on top of. Now, we have a document cam, and it is just a camera that is connected to a projector. The students can slide their papers right under it and be able to show their work and talk about it in front of other people. So yeah.

NANCY BOUTOT:

Thank you, Toni, and thank you for that presentation.

TONI DEPEEL:

You're welcome.

NANCY BOUTOT:

And thank you for that walk down memory lane, thinking about that projector (Laughs). Alright, now it's my pleasure to turn the presentation over to Tikeya Milburn from the D.C. Department on Disability Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration. Take it away, Tikeya, and thank you so much.

TIKEYA MILBURN:

Thank you so much, Nancy. My name is Tikeya Milburn. We provide services to individuals between the ages of 14 to 22 for our Pre-ETS services at the Department on Disability Services. Our mission is to provide services that enable people with disabilities to lead meaningful and productive lives as vital members of their families, schools, workplaces, and communities in every neighborhood within the District of Columbia. The Department of Disability Services is comprised of three agencies. They

are the Developmental Disabilities Administration, which is responsible for oversight and coordination of services for individuals who are qualified persons with an intellectual disability.

And my agency, which is the Rehabilitation Services Administration, which is referred to as RSA. We provide vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities and those who support them with preparing for, securing, or maintaining employment. Then we have our last agency, which is the Disability Determination agency, which works with individuals in regards to Social Security Insurance. Next slide please.

So before I hop into our experience with the Guided Group Discovery program, I just wanted to talk little bit about our collaboration of services and how it kind of all came about. So we work with local schools to ensure uninterrupted services for student transitioning from a secondary education environment to post-secondary education, training, and employment. To determine a person's needs and to prepare them for employment, we partner with qualified service providers, which I will tell you a little bit about later.

RSA also partners with the workforce system, the Workforce Investment Counsel, state education agency, the child welfare system, the Department on Behavioral Health, and many, many more agencies. Next slide please.

So the origin of the program was the program was developed by the LEAD Center, ODEP, and DOL, and the program was piloted in Oregon. That program was brought over to the District of Columbia where we became the first urban area to implement the program. So RCM, which is one of our HCA providers, customized and adapted the program to fit the needs of the D.C. population and job market. They adapted to virtual



learning using the Nearpod platform; that was because this program was piloted during COVID-19. Next slide please.

So here's a little bit about the Guided Group Discovery history, so as I mentioned, it was piloted during COVID-19, which was in spring of 2021. We partnered with our supported employment provider, RCM of Washington, and the River Terrace Education Campus to introduce the Guided Group Discovery project to teachers and students with the support of the VR counselor assigned to the school. So River Terrace is one of our schools within the District of Columbia. You will hear from them later on today.

Participants created individual blueprints to guide them as they navigated their journey toward implement. So the Guided Group Discovery program provided a peer-to-peer opportunity for jobseekers to jointly identify their interests, skills, and accommodations for employment. It helped address the need for youth with disabilities to develop work skills and work opportunities while they were still in school and to identify needed supports to help them with getting a job. Next slide.

At the conclusion of the piloted program—which again, I want to mention that it was during COVID-19—we had a great success. We had 33 of 44 participants, which was about a 75% completion rate, complete blueprints for employment, and they were able to gain the knowledge and skills and confidence to pursue their future employment endeavors. Due to the success of this program, the Guided Group Discovery process was extended to the general vocational rehabilitation population to provide adults with access to this program, as well. The pilot adults program started in November 2021, and while they didn't have as many participants as we had within the transition requirement, they did have three participants who completed blueprints for employment.

This program was super, super huge, again, at our River Terrace Education Campus. That school is known to work with individuals who have the most significant disabilities. So these numbers here, and seeing 75% of completion, were super, super good. Next slide please.

Now we are going to take a look into one of our student's blueprints. Next slide.

So here is the Blueprint for Employment, and it is exactly what it says: "it's all about you." So part of the blueprint consisted of individuals informing the individual who they were working with, their peer mentor about their interests, their skills, their tasks, and their positive personality traits. So I'm not going to go through each of them, but if we just want to pause for a quick second so you guys can look at it and kind of take it in and see what it consists of.

NANCY BOUTOT: Everybody, we will give out a copy of the presentation. We have a lot of interest in some of the slides that you are showing, Tikeya, so they will be posted. This whole presentation will be posted on the LEAD website within 7 to 10 days.

TIKEYA MILBURN: Alright, we can go to the next slide. Here are some vocational themes and accommodations. And again, I will just pause here so you guys can look at those. Again, this is all self-informed. This is all driven by the individual who is developing their blueprint for employment. So these are just obviously some of the interests that the individual had in common themes that they showed. So for example, if the individual said they were interested in books, we could kind of determine they would not mind working at a library or a bookstore or a museum. Same for the retail where we've had individuals say that they are interested in shopping and things like that, which we know includes some stores like Target or mall jobs and things like that. Sometimes

themes request a one-to-one shopper; that is how we determine what those things are. Here are some accommodations, disclosure, and framing sensitive information. So this person says, "I may need additional time or trainings to learn new tasks. Needing more time does not mean I will not be good of a job. In fact, what they learn my task, I am good!"

This individual also shared that he was hesitant to share his disability with others because he did not want to be looked at differently, which we know is a common thing that we see within the vocational rehabilitation services. A lot of students that we serve determine that they do not want to share their disability. Sometimes, they may need instruction in self-advocacy to inform them that they don't have to disclose if they do not choose to. Next slide please.

So here is a success story. We have quite a few of these. I'm going to read two. Then we have quite a few videos, as well, that will be included in the PowerPoint. Then we will also have an actual video so you guys can hear from one of our individuals, as well. So Adam finished a GGD program in 2022 and graduated from River Terrace. While in the program, he explored his skills and his interests. An emerging theme was interest in helping others and working with children or youth. He was able to use the skills he learn from the Guided Group Discovery program to apply for, interview, and secure job on his own as a cafeteria worker at a local elementary school. His main role is to assist with preparing the fruit for lunches. He received job coaching from the supports of Rehabilitation Services Administration at the start but has now fully faded supports and is doing well. So he is working independently.

He has maintained his job since September 2022, and his case was closed successfully

within the Vocational Rehabilitation Services. He loves helping the kids, and he loves having summers off. I wish I had summers off too, Adam. Next slide.

Alright, so Tyrone: Tyrone finished the GGD program in 2022. He then enrolled in NAF Academy of Hospitality and Tourism at the River Terrace Education Campus in 2022-2023. He was able to gain additional career skill development. He graduated in June 2023. While in the program, he identified skills and interests. An emerging theme for him was his openness to many areas of employment including cleaning, security, and customer service. Using the skills learned in GGD, he successfully applied for, interviewed for, and attained a summer job at Six Flags as a ride operator. He is maintaining this employment. He advocates for himself well, and because of the Guided Group Discovery program, he can clearly identify the supports he needs and knows how to request them. Next slide.

Alright, I will turn it back over to Nancy at this time. Thank you.

NANCY BOUTOT: Thank you very much, Tikeya. Next, we are going to watch a short video featuring one of our next speakers, Jhiya Cooper, as well as Wendy Parker. So we are going to show this on YouTube. So typically what happens is the sound might be a little light. So you may need to adjust your speakers. There's nothing wrong with the video; it's just the way YouTube operates. And with that, we will watch the video.

(Captioned Video plays)

NANCY BOUTOT: Now I will turn it over to you.

WENDY PARKER: I am getting over a cold so I apologize. I am the Manager of Transition here at D.C. Public Schools. So similar to Toni, I don't support one school; I

support all programs for students with IEP and 504 Plans who are transitioning out, specifically juniors and seniors across the District. I will add, so I don't forget, that I am a thirty-something-year-old Black woman of medium complexion, and my hair is pulled back in a little bun today. I have a headset on, as if I am taking orders from McDonald's, and I have a little freckles. I will let Jhiya introduce herself.

JHIYA COOPER: Hello, my name is Jhiya Cooper, and I was a Guided Discovery participant at River Terrace last year or actually, not last year but in 2021. I enjoyed every minute of the program because it taught me a lot about my job skills and the blueprint I built when I did my resume. It also helped me to become a part of the Project SEARCH program and through all the internships I had when I worked there. And it helped me with the jobs, all the previous three jobs I've had, and the job I have now at Marshall's. So it has really helped me gain my skills.

WENDY PARKER: Thank you, Jhiya. I will ask you a couple of more questions because it has been a few years. Can you remind again us when did you graduate from high school?

JHIYA COOPER: I graduated from the class of 2020: June 24, 2020.

WENDY PARKER: Jhiya was a nonpublic student who had funds to go outside of our DCPS schools. Then she was accepted and to one of our employment training programs, which was held at River Terrace. I want to answer one of questions in the chat. River Terrace is a school for our students with the most significant needs in the District. However, in that school, we have a special training program called the Workforce Development Center.

Those students are completely different training and employment so the need is

different than the rest of the school. So we did work with Workforce Development...

SPEAKER: It looks like Wendy froze.

SPEAKER: I can hear Wendy okay.

SPEAKER: She didn't freeze for me.

WENDY PARKER: I will keep going now. So Jhiya was part of the Workforce Development Center, and we did Guided Group Discovery outside the Workforce Development Center with the other students, as well. So I hope that answers your question.

So, Jhiya, you said you had how many jobs after graduating and exiting DCPS?

JHIYA COOPER: I had three previous jobs, and they were: the first one I got accepted when I graduated out of Project SEARCH was a hardware store. After that, I left the hardware store, and I got hired working with a company that partnered with city cruises where I took photos of people at parties and at different events they'd have on boats and sell the photos to the customers. Also, I got a job through an organization called Best Buddies. And now, I am working at Marshall's.

WENDY PARKER: Thank you. If you don't mind, can you tell the audience: when you are working at Marshall's, did you request any accommodations or anything you needed to be successful that maybe you have learned in the blueprint?

JHIYA COOPER: Yes. I definitely talk to my job coach and my supervisor. I ask for accommodations to help me on the job. Also, my job coach helped write notes when I was doing shoes, organizing and processing shoes. I need a list that helps me on how to do my job correctly, for example, put the sensor through the shoe and through the price tag. So it would be easier for me to see what to do in the instructions that I follow.

Also, my job coach made a Marshall's guide on my phone in the “notes” on my phone, so I can look at it so I could know what step to do next or if I don't know what to do I can go my phone and look at the notes.

WENDY PARKER: Thank you. And so, we are coming down to the end, so I want to ask you one last question: where do you see yourself—and this doesn't just have to be about employment—where do you see yourself in the next five years?

JHIYA COOPER: In the next five years, definitely I want to work on getting my GED or get my high school diploma and get my barbering license because I'd like to do barbering, cut the hair. I also get my own place, my own apartment, so I could live independently and be on my own. And start to pay bills and be a successful adult.

WENDY PARKER: I love that. I also want to add for the audience that I have worked with Jhiya for about three years, maybe four, and one of the things that really makes this a success story is that family engagement. Her mother has been incredible. When we talk about Guided Group Discovery and having that team, I don't think the teams work in silos. It is not just the school system or the VR system. It is the family, as well, and so to me, that is a huge component of the Guided Group Discovery and our success stories. If there are any other questions, we are available here, but if not, I can pass it back to the moderators. Thank you.

JHIYA COOPER: You're welcome.

NANCY BOUTOT: Thank you so much. I think you won an award, Jhiya. I don't know if you realize, but there are so many clapping hands and thumbs-ups and hearts and party hats. I want to award you with the prize for getting the most of those as a presenter. Rebecca, do we have any questions?

REBECCA SALON: We do have a few questions, and I will cluster a few together. I think this is probably for both Wendy and Toni about how people get referred into Guided Group Discovery or become a part of it and how you accommodate people who have more significant disabilities. I know that it was mentioned that DCPS, the D.C. public schools, use a Nearpod system. I know there are things that both systems did to make things more graphic, for lower reading levels, and you both adapted the Guided Group Discovery materials. So maybe if both Toni and Wendy could talk about how people got into the program and how you adapted the materials, that would be helpful, I think.

WENDY PARKER: Absolutely. So for the pilot program, we specifically wanted to work with the students who were going into the Workforce Development Center at River Terrace. All those students apply, are interviewed, and then get accepted, so they are not the typical students who had moved through the school due to the higher need. I want to make sure that is clear. We work with the Workforce Development Center, and then we work with the students who went to the Workforce Development Center but needed additional assistance. For us, focusing on those students about to exit, this was a critical piece of making sure they were ready and prepared and needed those Customized Employment skills.

During COVID-19, we did use Nearpod, which is a curriculum that is an accessible way for students to engage with their teachers. But all of the classes, the special education teachers are in the class. So they also have the instructor, as well as the instructor aid. While RCM, the provider agency, is teaching the class, the instructor who specializes in



accommodations for students and know the students IEPs can scaffold it for each student.

TONI DEPEEL: Thank you. So, much like what Wendy was mentioning, when I go to classrooms, the teacher is there, along with assistance, and we really do a lot of scaffolding and changing and making sure that it is fitting for each student. And more significant classrooms, I have not worked in. There was a question asked at one point about if a substitute came in. Because I would rarely come in, so once per week; it's not like I am assigned to a school and the students know me. So I think that is a key thing. If there is somebody already in the school who is interested in looking at the curriculum, I think that is really optimal for students with more complex needs.

We did make some adaptations: I think I have three levels that I work off of, and I try to make a decision on what is going to be the best fit for the group of students. And then really just being fluid and willing and flexible for any change that is needed to happen during the classroom time. And not pushing; if I can't finish one lesson, I am not going to push. I am just going to get the best results for the students at that time.

A lot of flexibility and willingness to say, "Hey, we might not get this lesson done today. But that is not the goal, finishing the lesson." The goal is that the student gets some Discovery and has the best experience with that learning.

I know there was another question... What was the other question? I am trying to remember what else it was.

NANCY BOUTOT: Actually, we are right at time, so we are not going to be able to answer any more questions, but for all the speakers, I want to say thank you. And if we do have some unanswered questions, we could send them to you speakers and put you

in touch with folks who are asking some of the questions, and I think that would be really helpful.

We had a jampacked presentation today. I want to go on to the very end of the presentation. There are six slides that Laura is going through right now, so just know that when you get the presentation, you will have six pages of resource slides. The presentation that you will receive will include Jhiya Cooper's video, which was something that many people were interested in. Thank you for joining the LEAD WIOA Policy Development Center. Please visit us at our website. Thank you for joining, and we appreciate it. We will see you next time. Goodbye.