

The Good Jobs Initiative (GJI): Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Transcript

October 26, 2023

SARAH: I would like to welcome everyone. We're glad you've joined us today to learn more about The Good Jobs Initiative (GJI): creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Through the Good Jobs Initiative (GJI), the U.S. Department of Labor is focused on improving job quality and creating access to good jobs for all working people, including people with disabilities.

It's October, which means it's National Disability Employment Awareness Month, known as NDEAM. Today, you will hear from a variety of panelists, including employers and people with disabilities they employ in good jobs. To ensure success, employers will share how employing people with disabilities has benefited their respective businesses. This webinar is hosted by the Center on Leadership for the Employment and Economic Advancement of People with Disabilities, or the LEAD Center. We are a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) policy development center.

The LEAD Center is led by National Disability Institute and is funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and the U.S. Department of Labor.

Together, we facilitate the adoption and integration of inclusive WIOA programs and policies and practices through research, technical assistance, and demonstration projects. Next slide, please.

My name is Sarah Loizeaux. And I go by she/her/hers. I'm a white woman with long brown hair, and today, I'm wearing a purple shirt and gray sweater. I'm honored to be the moderator of today's event. In my role, I provide technical assistance to the LEAD WIOA policy development center as a subject matter expert on inclusive career pathways, and I'm so glad you're here with us today. Next slide.

We would like to take a moment to share some captioning and housekeeping tips. Today's webinar is live captioned, and the captions appear below the slide deck. You also have the option to open the captioning webpage in a new browser, and the links have been posted in the chat or will be momentarily. Once the captioning window opens, you can adjust the background color, the text color, and the font using the drop-down menus at the top of the browser. We suggest you position the window to be sitting on top of the embedded captioning to allow you to see the screen itself.

Next slide, please.

At any point, you can click the question and answer (Q & A) button located on the webinar menu bar, and this brings up a Q & A panel or window into which you can type questions for our presenters. We'll save time at the end for a question and answer period. Use the chat box if you're experiencing any technical issues or if you have questions for the technical support team. Please type them into the chat box. Next slide, please.

To provide a welcome and opening remarks and help to lay the groundwork for our

discussion today about The Good Jobs Initiative (GJI), I would like to introduce you to Taryn Mackenzie Williams, the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Policy. And in this position, she advises the Secretary of Labor on how the department's policies and programs impact the employment of people with disabilities, and she leads the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), which works with employers at all levels of government to promote evidence-based policy that improves employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities. Previously, Assistant Secretary Williams was the managing director for the Poverty to Prosperity Program at the Center for American Progress. Before joining the center, she worked at the Office for Disability Employment Policy on a variety of issues. Thank you for joining us, I'll turn it over to you.

TARYN: Thank you for that introduction. I'm excited to be here. I'm thrilled about the webinar today. Hello, everyone. As Sarah mentioned, I'm Taryn Williams, and I have the privilege of serving as the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy here at the DOL where I head the Office of Disability Employment Policy, or ODEP for short. I'm a Black woman, have shoulder length curly Afro hair, and I'm wearing a green scarf today. ODEP is a subcabinet agency within the U.S. Department of Labor that reports directly to the secretary. We were established by Congress a little over 20 years ago to create a federal agency dedicated to working across policies, programs, and federal agencies and external stakeholders to promote employment of people with disabilities. And on behalf of ODEP and DOL, welcome to today's webinar.

Our topic today is ensuring access and equity in this historic infrastructure investment made by the Biden Administration through the Infrastructure Investment in Jobs Act, the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS and Science Act. That includes historically underserved groups including people with disabilities and those who are multiply marginalized. And this is a core principle of our Good Jobs Initiative where we're working with our federal partners to ensure that historically underserved groups benefit from the multibillion dollar infrastructure programs and including the significant number of new federal contracts. Thus far, the department has entered into a memoranda of understanding and resulted in \$181 billion in investing in America funds with equity and job quality incentives in 91 funding opportunity announcements.

Today, we're very excited to examine these topics together through the lens of employers and how people with disabilities can be and are great employees in these good jobs. Many of you in the disability community have probably heard of Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE). This is a concept that people with disabilities need to be paid at least the minimum wage, work with individuals with and without disabilities, and receive the same benefits as all other employees and have the same opportunity to advance as other employees. The Good Jobs Principles, which are the foundation for the Good Jobs Initiative (GJI), take the concept further. The Good Jobs Principles include empowerment of representation and job security and working conditions, organizational culture and pay, and, of course, all of the aspects of what had we call DEIA, or diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Amongst others.

We're going to hear examples of the Good Jobs Principles in action. We'll hear from people with disabilities about their experience in their good job. We'll hear from employment system staff and job support staff about the goodness of fit between the

person with a disability and the good job and how together they made that happen. And we'll hear from several employers about the good things that people with disabilities are bringing to their business.

But before we start, I want to remind everyone this month is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). And this year's theme, is advancing access and equity—one of the Good Jobs Principles. There are only five days left (in October), but by attending this webinar, each of you are showing your commitment to increasing disability inclusion in the workplace. If you want to learn more about this, we have a blog, video, and presidential proclamation and other tools. And it's not too late to download or request a poster to start using the logo as your virtual background. And it's exciting how employers across the public and private sector have customized these tools to demonstrate their commitment to workplace inclusion for people with disabilities and all of these resources and more can be found at DOL.gov/NDEAM. And the first -- this year also marks the 50th Anniversary of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and we published interviews with various leaders how the law helped to advance access and equity for disabled people and developed a video explaining how the law affects millions across the nation every day.

But back to today's webinar. I'm excited to hear the stories from our panelists, and I want to thank the LEAD Center for hosting the webinar and all of the work that they do and you all do to increase employment and economic security for disabled individuals. And WIOA is grateful to you in advancing disability inclusion. And I'll stop, and I'm eager to hear from our panelists today and can't wait for the webinar. And Sarah, I'll pass it back to you.

SARAH: Thank you, Secretary Williams. That was great, and I'm excited to hear from the panelists, as well. We're going to learn a lot today. Throughout the webinar, the panelists will help us to understand how the Good Jobs Principles and Good Jobs Initiative (GJI) can be a potential source of Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) jobs for people with disabilities. We'll gain examples of people with disabilities already working in Good Jobs Initiative industries, and we'll explore strategies that can assist employers benefiting from employees with disabilities in their workforce, including employees with significant disabilities. And we'll hear from business leaders about the contributions of people with disabilities in their workforce. Next slide, please.

So we have three exciting panels you're going to hear from today. The first one comes from the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department in South Carolina; you'll hear a story from Larry Phillips, who has a career in welding. And next, Penn-Mar, Human Services in New Freedom, Pennsylvania; you'll hear how they assist their employers to successfully hire and retain those with disabilities. And that panel includes one of the businesses who works with Penn-Mar, and they'll talk about their relationship with each other and how they've successfully employed people with disabilities. And the final panel is Seek Employment, Equality, and Community (SEEC), located in Silver Spring, Maryland; this panel is going to have actually two individuals they're going to discuss that they've (SEEC) worked with. And you'll hear on the panel, one of their companies they work with, ResInnova Laboratories, and one of the individuals who works for them. I'm looking forward to hearing from everyone. Next slide, please.

So our first presenter is Shannon Reed, a vocational rehabilitation counselor for the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department. The mission of the department is to prepare and assist eligible South Carolinians with disabilities to achieve and maintain competitive employment. Their vision is to be the leader in quality employment outcomes for their consumers and business partners through people, partnerships, and performance.

Today, Shannon will share a story of South Carolina's Vocational Rehabilitation 2022 Consumer of the Year, Larry Phillips. Thanks to the assistance of Shannon and others, Larry overcame several obstacles and has been employed as a welder for the past two years. Shannon will show a video featuring Larry and some of the those partners.

Shannon, thank you for joining us today.

SHANNON: I'm a white female, short brown hair. I am wearing a flowered top and a black jacket. So thank you for having me today. I wanted to tell you more about our program. As you said, we work with a variety of individuals with limitations and partner with local companies and businesses. And things we try to do is help businesses recruit the right people for the company, doing task analysis, pre-screening, candidate referrals, and job fairs. Recently, we had a disability mentoring day with high school students where we invited companies to come and talk with the students to explain what the jobs are that are out there, what the demands are and skills needed. And they also helped with sharing with the high school students how to appropriately interview and what they need to do now while in high school.

With our program in South Carolina, we have a job readiness training program. And we are a resource for businesses and industries needing to complete projects or maybe a time or labor service that is too costly to complete in home -- in-house, sorry. And the individuals are able to learn skills and plans to have strategies to be success. And we work on budgeting and resume writing and stress management. And overall, we do a lot of vocational training and two- to four-year college. And we offer customized training work based training, and we offer on-the-job training, where businesses will partner with us, where they might find someone who they are interested in but not have the skills at the time to start with their company. We do on-the-job training, and our consumers are covered, workman's comp. And we can end up paying the individual up to 10 weeks while they're in training. Once the individual is hired, we still follow them for 90 to 120 days to make sure they're successful, that the individual is happy along with our business partner. And we have job retention services where we have a 28-day substance abuse program, and we have our rehab engineers that we'll talk a little bit more about and a comprehensive evaluation center, which is our program that works with individuals with TBIs, pain management, prosthetic and orthopedic needs. I'll tell you a bit about Larry, who was our consumer of the year.

When I met Larry, he had a spinal cord injury as a result of a gunshot and spent 10 years in prison. When I first met Larry, he had two goals -- one, he wanted to get off disability (benefits) and wanted to be able to provide for his family. He wanted to work full time, to be there -- he knew there were things to do, he just needed help and guidance navigating around. And another thing, he wanted to be a good role model for his sons and show them that he could -- people can change and do better. And that's

exactly what Larry did.

So what we're going to do is we have a video that talks a bit about Larry. He's going to tell a bit about his experience with voc. rehab. Some things we did with Larry, we partnered with the WIOA in assisting with training for him, along with our partners, Arc Labs. And W International ended up hiring him, and we did a variety of services with him, such as rehab engineers who is assisted in evaluating him and offering certain tools, such as flat tires for his wheelchair, a welder's hat, and a protective welding apron between his chest down to his feet. So I will introduce our video on Larry Phillips. (Larry Phillips's video plays).

SHANNON: So that was Larry. We were able to offer him a variety of services, and we had so really good partners willing to give him a chance and opportunity. So I want to thank you for your time, and I'll pass it over to Miss Sarah.

SARAH: Thank you. My camera! Thank you so much, Shannon, for joining us today and telling us Larry's story. I love his story and the fact he's been at W International for over two years is incredible.

So I like to move on to our next group of panelists. And we're going to speak with Tricia. Tricia Zeltwanger is a career counselor at Penn-Mar in New Freedom, Pennsylvania. They connect -- support people to connect their interests, skills, and conditions for success to Competitive Integrated Employment. And joining Tricia is an employer partner she works with called AquaPhoenix. And you'll hear from Steven Kerr, and who is the director of Human Resources and Trina Mansfield, who is the Human Resources coordinator. AquaPhoenix is a leader in test kits and reagent manufacturing and chemical feed and control. I'll hand it over to you, Tricia.

TRICIA: I'm Tricia Zeltwanger. I'm a career counselor job developer and a consultant for Penn-Mar. Today, I will describe myself: blonde, I want to say I'm a young woman, and I have blonde hair and am wearing a peach shirt and brown coat. It's a pleasure to be here. I've been excited to be given this opportunity to present today and join with Steven and Tina from AquaPhoenix, on how we collaborated to create opportunities for someone there. And we did that through a customized employment approach. The key - - sorry, can you mind going to the next slide, please. There are phases -- here we go -- to customized employment, and on the screen, I have described discovery and assessment, job development, employment and workplace supports. And all four of these are key, again, as I mentioned, to the success and great outcomes for the people we support.

Discovery -- I'm going to give you a rundown on each of these and what they look like. Discovery and assessment: what we do is we discover. We work with an individual and discover all of their great skills and interests and talents and most importantly their passions about wanting employment in their community and also, what would be -- how would things be successful for them. What does successful employment look like? How would they be most happy in that type of employment?

The next slide is the job development. This is where I conduct informational interviews and connect with my community, maybe through networking to identify businesses that make sense for all of the different things we've discovered through this discovery and assessment of the individual. And that's how I met AquaPhoenix Scientific. I go and try

and identify the labor needs inside of their business and sharing stories they may -- you know, backlogs in different areas of their business that maybe would apply to the skills and interests and wants for employment for a person I'm supporting.

And the next part is the great part. The passion of everything that I have here, the employment side of it. This is where I'm going to successfully negotiate the job duties for the individual. It comes down to the pay, the hours, the benefits. Everything that is - - you know, we do for ourselves, but we customize for that individual.

The other part is -- sorry. Is the, um -- the workplace supports. This is one of the most -- the most important parts for the phases of employment, to have -- creating a great outcome for someone. That is, finding out where the supports might be needed inside of that business. It could be as simple as someone needing supports with punching in. We could have had especially to create those natural supports inside of their business in the new endeavor, place of employment. They need someone to help them support with that. Or getting to the workstation on time. Or just knowing how to know whether or not they're going to have a company picnic that month. Having them be able to know and identify the areas of maybe where they list those things. And creating that passionate relationship with the employer to be able to help accommodate their new employee, actually.

A lot of the supports come through, um, you know the office -- the voc. Rehab. in the Pennsylvania area, what's it called. OVR, and also DOORS, where supports are given and funding sources to be able to practice what we put in place here, to help someone have a really great successful outcome in our community. I'm extremely passionate about this process because it is really an untapped labor market. Right? And I want to make sure anyone who wants to work in our community has the opportunity to do that. And if you know me, you know how passionate I am about this.

Um, what I want to do, I do want to give you a couple of scenarios -- not scenarios but great success stories before I turn it over to one of my best stories, which is with AquaPhoenix Scientific. I created a few that I wanted to talk about today. One of them, when we supported an individual, through this process, customized employment and the phases of the employment; it's called custom engraving, and this was a great relationship that I built through, again, through the networking type of events and things like that. But what I did -- sorry, can you go to the next slide? I apologize, forgot to ask. Thank you.

What I did is customized an opportunity. I met with the employer and learned that they were in need of products to be unpacked and repacked. He's an engraver. Yeti cups, awards, and things like that. And they were able to identify their needs, and I looked at how much time needed the supports and what time of day that needed to be supported and the great part, um, the beautiful part of all of this is the growth that someone has. You know, exploring new ideas and even self-advocating. I was so proud of this individual; he got in there and learned the packing and unpacking part of the products, but then he learned he has more skill and wants to apply them to that business. And now he operates a laser engraving machine. And look: the outcome, right? More skill, more money. Makes him very, very happy. A big shoe buyer, and he gets to spend lots of money on new shoes.

The other one is Sample Express. It's an individual that comes off the words of mom and dad, "I don't think he's employable. Good luck." And I took on the challenge. This individual is autistic, non-verbal, and identified a company in our community and made that relationship with them. He walked in and did an informational interview and learned the business: roof shingles for sample boards, the kind that goes into a briefcase. And the guy goes around and shows different businesses what samples of different shingles and looked like they needed someone to put those on the sample board, and it's repetitive. Dexterity is required. Precision. And this young gentleman, I was able to identify, again, through the phases of employment, through all of the discovery and assessment, I was able to find his niche in this.

The growth for him, once he got in there-- I could tell he had an eye for making up boxes. Okay, let's give it a try. So now he is versatile in his workplace, not only does the sample shingles but can make the boxes for all of the other products that are inside of that business.

Both of these gentlemen have been employed now for more than five years in each of these different locations doing exceptionally well, and the relationship has been built to be a great one.

I do want to say that I'm so happy and pleased to introduce you guys to -- sorry. Steve Kerr. And Trina Mansfield from AquaPhoenix Scientific. This is another company that I knocked on their door and created a relationship with. And created an opportunity for a young man. And the value of the partnership is so fulfilling to me. And I truly appreciate their partnership. So thank you so much for listening. I hope you guys enjoy the rest of the webinar, and I'm going to turn it over to Steven and Tina.

STEVEN: Thank you. Appreciate that. Welcome, everyone. We're not good at this, so we'll try to do the best we can. I'm Steve Kerr, the director of Human Resources for AquaPhoenix Scientific and wearing a black shirt with a company logo with a Phoenix on it for AquaPhoenix, and pants.

TRINA: I'm Trina Mansfield. I work with recruiting, as well as on-boarding special folks that we've had partnerships with. Wearing a blue shirt with glasses, blonde hair, and white woman and a company logo with the Phoenix on there. I'm excited to be part of this webinar.

STEVEN: We don't know what to say. We're honored to be part of this. We don't look at it as hiring people with disabilities. We look at it as helping people who help us grow our business. We're proud to have these partnerships with AquaPhoenix and proud to help out the community, and we know we've all been touched by someone who has disabilities or has mountains to climb, if you will. And we're proud to have individuals like that in our company that we can make a special part of our team as we move forward in our business.

Next slide. We have a video to kind of show you a bit about our company. Tina is going to read. I messed that up. I put in words but not the voice-over. We'll add that. We're not good at this. But it explains a bit about our company and the type of jobs we're able to have individuals with disabilities do and how we can make modifications for them. And hopefully the video will start.

TINA: AquaPhoenix Scientific. AquaPhoenix Scientific is a custom manufacturer offering

innovative products and services for industrial water quality testing and chemical feed and control. We manufacture drop count test kits reagents and calibration solutions and control panels and pump skids and filtration units and much more. We are coast-to-coast. Our locations across the U.S. are in Pennsylvania, Texas, California, and Virginia. We pride ourselves on being a different kind of supplier. Our custom packing, fabrication, and private label capabilities allow us to create unique products.

STEVEN: I promise that was not a shameless plug, but that was the only video we could come up with. And Tory [the employee with a disability] was nervous to be on video, and we couldn't convince him to speak to the group. At AquaPhoenix, we pride ourselves on ways to embed ourselves in the community, and this is one of the ways we do that. Across the country and other facilities, we have the same standards; if we can employ them and they're part of our success, we welcome them. Tory, our individual that's been with us, both Tina and I met with Trish, and we can make this work. And it's been a great success. Tory rides his bike to work or from his parents' house, but we explain to supervisors if it's a wet day or off weather, that Tory might be late. We made accommodations how he can come into work and when, but we've found he's been seamless in the transition into the workforce on regular standards, and we hold him to the same standards we do all of our employees and don't really look at it as making accommodations when we have 351 employees every day including ourselves we're making accommodations for. So he's no different or any of the teams across the country we employ that might have some slight modifications; they're still part of our team and we try and accommodate those. Tina, for on-boarding, I think he understood everything from are the computer work to -- ?

TINA: Each part. Whether it was the day of or moving forward. For anyone that starting a new job, it can be extremely challenging, and he handled that with grace. And he's a happy individual, which makes everything easy to work with. Each step, he took it on with great pride.

STEVEN: We learned with Tory and some other folks that understanding or comprehension, for everyone, is completely different, with their disabilities. But with Tory, we've learned with the help of Trish how to sometimes modify our discipline or our coaching. I like to call it coaching better. Early on, we made mistakes, but with Trish's help, we realized, he's really, really sensitive, and we can relate. We wear our heart on our sleeve here, and we've learned to work with that a little bit and how we speak with him and how we can make his day better. And at the end of the day, we want him going home happy. He's a part of our family, and we can grow together. I think --

TINA: We can turn it back over to Sarah.

STEVEN: Turn it back over to Sarah.

SARAH: Thank you, guys. So much. That was great! So, I'm getting a lot of good stuff. Can't take notes fast enough. But I want to move us to our final presenters. I'm excited, talking about two different individuals. This is from SEEC, which is Seek Employment, Equality, and Community. And they're in Silver Spring, Maryland. We're going to hear today from Pamela Toole. She's the Lead Employment Outreach Consultant for SEEC. And we'll hear from Zachary Chambers, a regional employment counselor for SEEC. And we're going to hear from one of SEEC's employer partners, Matthew Hardwick, Ph.D.

He's the president and CEO of ResInnova Laboratories in Rockville, Maryland and founded it in 2014. And is the cofounder and CEO of ResInnova Clinical Diagnostics, working closely with community-oriented groups and serves as an active leader, focusing on local partnerships and engagement. And also joining from ResInnova Laboratories, Bridget Lew, a Research Technician and a valuable member of their team, thanks to the partnership and support from SEEC.

SEEC provides a different array of services and worked with a variety of employers. And we're going to learn about another employee named Brett. And he works for UPS, and we'll hear his story and at the conclusion of the time. We'll hear a video about Brett's job at UPS, and you'll get to hear from his employer and co-worker. I don't want to take any more time. So, Pamela, handing it over to you.

PAMELA: Thank you. Sarah. We're happy to be here to share our stories and a little bit about the work we do. This first slide I think is important. What I do at SEEC is a little bit unique. I do employer outreach. I don't support people directly. We do a lot of similar work to Penn-Mar and other agencies across the country and D.C. area. My job is to work with business and talk to employers, which is really the focus of my presentation to you today.

But a little bit about SEEC. I think our mission is really integral to that. You're seeing a slide right now that shows our mission statement which is thrive, with a graphic about houses, and work, which is a bit about -- a graphic about that. And thrive, for us is about connectedness and engagement with community.

We are guided by four C's. Our belief that anyone who has a job, has competency and contribution and connection and has cash. Everyone has something they do well, and it's our job at SEEC to unpack what that is.

We then work with businesses to fit those in to what their needs are. If someone has a job, they can contribute and have competency and cash, which translates to buying power and can contribute to the local economy. We feel that contributes to Competitive Integrated Employment. Next slide.

The next slide is a bit about SEEC's impact, and it's also illustrative. Because we work with over 200 employers and support over 345 people in the local community. And the number of people we have working with 58% versus the national average of 20%. We also are working with state professionals throughout the area to improve professional development and the skills they have to do this work. I want to pause because I wanted to point out I'm a white woman with medium brown hair and glasses and wearing a black shirt today.

I think -- our impact is wide but the fact that we work with over 200 employers is important, that we partner with employers, small and large. We have internship programs throughout the D.C. area and at NIH and Hilton Hotels and local county government, and we work with small businesses and large organizations to help them identify what their unmet operational needs are and show them how a customized role can be a business solution.

There's a study by Accenture that shows how companies can see a 28% higher revenue and increased operational efficiency from hiring people with disabilities into these critical roles. It's not just one job at one company; it's a workforce trend and solving

business solutions and partners that will hire more than one person if they see the value as an untapped talent pipeline. We have people working anywhere from a few hours a week, up to full-time roles doing lab work and administration and records management and all sorts of things. We need to be at the front end and watch what those workforce trends are, and it's a rapidly changing workforce. And we're helping to provide that challenge. Next slide.

I wanted to point out how we measure with businesses. We truly see this as a partnership and we support our businesses as much as we can. We feature them on our website. So what you're seeing right now is a snapshot of our employment page, and it details different industries where we have people working. Administrative, arts and entertainment, environmental services, and health sciences and so on.

The next slide shows we partner with our companies and feature them on our website. We have Target and Smithsonian Institution and others. We want to give back to our partners; all of these then link to their website, and we push people on social media, featuring them as inclusive employers and want to work with companies to partner and solve their employment and recruitment challenges and support their businesses. And we're buying their products and referring their services and businesses. We feel like that's important. Next slide, please.

More of the logos to show you the breadth of what we do and how we try and feature people. I think it's important for businesses to understand it's not just one type of job that people with disabilities have; it's all over the gamut. It's all different industries. People have interests and abilities that can serve all sorts of things, and we're working on finding out what they are and working with the businesses to match up to the perfect job. Next slide, please.

I like to show this because I think, as a new employer, I talk to employers all the time, and I used to be an employer. I used to be managing and in a fast-paced operation, where, if someone came to me with this, I would be at a glance, nervous and not know what to do. I'm not a swimmer, gives me anxiety. But I'm not going to be happy and confident until I learn how to swim laps by myself independently. In the beginning, I know what I want to do but don't know how. And might jump out of the pool. And many employers feel that way. To assure you we know how to teach and coach you...it's not easy. We want to make it smooth and easy, and that's what we're here to do.

In the long run, it's for the people we support, and for the business, and our job and goal is long-term retention. And on-the-job support is one of the things that is extremely confusing to employers. How does that work? How does customized employment work? What does that mean?

Our team comes in and shows you. We come in and learn the task and the needs. We bring someone that we feel would fit that role and make it happen. We're in there in the beginning. We don't want you to jump out of the pool. We want to get a strong foundation laid. And then we back away when we feel that people can swim solo. Both the employer and employee. We're here to support the business and improve outcomes for employers as much as we are for the job seekers.

I want to turn this over to Matt and Bridget. Both from ResInnova Labs to tell their story. More about Matt. He's not only a SEEC employer but also a member of SEEC's

business advisory council and SEEC's board of directors. Zachary Chambers supports Brett at UPS and is a regional employment coordinator at SEEC. Next slide. Turn this over to Matt and Bridget.

MATTHEW: That's my cue. I'm Matt Hardwick. A boring old white guy who uses he, him pronouns and got gray-black hair and wearing a red shirt and jazzed things up with a pair of red glasses. I admit, I'm totally observing the ASL interpreter. And I absolutely -- just fascinated by it.

I'll get into what I'm supposed to talk about. ResInnova Labs is a microbiology laboratory. Deep science and do a lot of bench work. That's means we work with bacteria and different liquid reagents and solid reagents. And we hired Bridget in 2018 to help us in making reagents and pouring what are called agar plates. If you've seen pictures of gross looking stuff growing on plate, Bridget makes amazing agar plates that are important to what we do. You can correct me, but I believe this is your first job, or at least full-time. She works three days a week, six hours a day. And Bridget is instrumental. She's super-productive and critical to the rest of my staff's productivity. Makes a lot of the reagents we use every day and specialized. There you go. Big things in sleeves, those are the agar plates. That's the old lab. Before we moved to our new place and she's adding a -- I believe a nutrient broth to 50ML tubes there. And we use those every day, and she's so good at it that she teaches our summer interns. They come in, and the first week they are with us, they learn how to do these alongside Bridget. She's the best and teaches them.

The other thing that's changed a lot since Bridget came on is our culture. We are a better communicator now -- we are better communicators now. I think people show a lot more patience with each other, and we really improved accessibility. And I'm talking less about accessibility with moving around, you know, getting to and fro, though we have that as well. It's more accessibility of ideas, making sure that everybody at the table understands what we're talking about when we have our lab meetings. And things like that.

One of the attendees said they appreciate how Mr. Steve Kerr noted that all employees need some form of accommodations in the workplace from time to time. I echo that 100%. One of things I observed with Bridget is that Bridget is no different than the rest of us in the fact she communicates differently. I start to notice each of us has a unique way of communicating and receiving communications. We have our own individual ways of expressing stress, relaxation, and Bridget is no different. It's no accommodation to have Bridget working with us. In fact, she probably does a lot more accommodating of us than we of her. She's a tolerant person and works really, really well in a chaotic environment that the lab sometimes is. I don't think I have anything else -- Pam, I guess I'll turn it over to Bridget and Zachary.

ZACHARY: Bridget, would you like to introduce yourself?

BRIDGET: I'm Bridget, and I guess I have black hair, a Rebok jacket. I'm not much of a talker.

ZACHARY: Well, I appreciate you being honest today. I know it was not your first choice. But I do appreciate it nonetheless. Bridget, can you tell us what you do every day at work?

BRIDGET: I guess like what Matt said, I basically -- I make plates with the agar. It's like a solution, a heated solution, and then pour it in the plates, called a petri dish. I guess that's pretty much all I do.

ZACHARY: And how many of those do you make per day?

BRIDGET: Maybe like over 100 but less than 200. I don't know. I don't count.

ZACHARY: That's a lot. I think --

STEVEN: Bridget is selling herself short. She does a lot more than making plates and has the ability to do a lot more of the agar plates. I understand why she said she doesn't keep track. It's a lot to keep track of.

ZACHARY: In this photo, all of those were made by Bridget, I'm pretty sure. It's not a little. And so Bridget, can you tell me about when you were first on the job, how long did it take you to get to the job and know what you were doing?

BRIDGET: When I first joined, I don't think it took that long for me to understand what I'm supposed to do. I think I just got it quickly.

MATTHEW: A few days. We were expecting two weeks, and she got it within the first week, for sure.

ZACHARY: Bridget, did you have more you wanted to say?

BRIDGET: I don't think so.

ZACHARY: Can I ask you two more questions? Do you feel you're contributing to the overall experience?

BRIDGET: I am.

ZACHARY: And how do you feel about your co-workers?

BRIDGET: They're great.

ZACHARY: Would you like to answer a question from the audience? How do you like to be trained?

BRIDGET: I'm not sure.

ZACHARY: Okay. All right, um, thank you, Bridget. You can shut off your camera if you would like now.

MATTHEW: One of the great things when Bridget was originally trained, how quickly she took to the hands-on part. I think she maybe had a little trepidation. One of the things she is holding in her right hand is a pipette, which has a filter at the top, and if you get liquid up in that filter, it can destroy the whole thing, so probably had nervousness about that. But because she's so precise, after the first couple days, that was not a concern anymore. The physical aspect she learned very, very quickly.

She -- like she said, she's integral to what we do. No doubt. Someone asked about the benefits both tangible and intangible. From a bottom line perspective, she's one of our most productive workers, works 18 hours a week, and she's producing and producing and gets her assignments in the morning and tackles them. When she needs a break, takes one, doesn't have to consult with anyone about that. And when she's done, comes back and gets her job done. When she's done, she's got her cubicle and goes there and does whatever she does until it's time to go. From a tangible perspective, incredibly cost effective to work with a diplomatic employee like Bridget. The training is minimal. If we change up her job, we bring in Zachary to job coach. And off to the races again. Reliable.

Intangible: talking about the current culture. We're more patient with each other. We've had employees join the staff who didn't fit that priority and didn't stay on after that...and didn't stay on the team. If you can't deal well with Bridget, you don't belong at ResInnova. If you're not treating Bridget well, you're not going to treat anyone else well. From an intangible perspective, she's very...really, really important to us. I can't stress enough how integral her work is to us.

PAMELA: Going back to the notion of customized jobs, I often say that every job is customized, as was mentioned. Many jobs just aren't job descriptions and job postings. They're really kind of seeing the -- discovering the employer and customizing the needs of the employer to fit an employee. Can you talk about the early days? Was this a job you were thinking you needed to post somewhere? Was there a job description? How did it start?

MATTHEW: I had a general idea of how we could incorporate someone with a disability into working at ResInnova Labs. I thought that labs would be a great place for someone with a considerable amount of focus. And who liked -- didn't mind doing incredibly repetitive things. And, you know, that's -- I always felt that was a good -- the lab is a good atmosphere for that.

The fact that we tend to be cerebral in the lab also works well with folks who have disabilities because there's the cerebral aspect to the cognition of what they're doing. Many of us try to figure out how another person sort of goes about their tasks, and if we apply that to Bridget, we have to apply that to everybody, right? And what you said, every job is customized over time. And we have to accommodate each other, and it's just being human. Treating each other like humans. There's no real accommodation for Bridget. We just love her as a team and treat her as a valued teammate.

PAMELA: We have one more story. Time to move on, right? Time for the next one.

Zach, do you want to talk about Brett a little bit?

ZACHARY: Absolutely. I know there's questions about how the process works. So I'll add more into the story. We've been working with Brett for quite -- about four or five years so far.

PAMELA: Yeah. A while.

ZACHARY: For a while. And Brett has had a journey moving through our community engagement program, and then he had a few other jobs before he landed at his current position, which is as a loader at UPS. So he's in the trucks every day, unloading them, so that they can be shipped locally in the region of Maryland. I'm Zachary Chambers, the regional coordinator, he/him pronouns and have a beard and glasses and a black shirt.

PAMELA: Yes.

ZACHARY: So it wasn't always the most clean journey, wasn't the easiest for Brett. He definitely went through a few jobs where things didn't quite work out before he ended up at UPS. But one thing that we really understood after really getting to know Brett and going through the discovery process and the job development process was he needed to be very active at work. And needed to have boundaries in place that really allowed him to understand what was the limits of his work day; and how I need to do this and this, and then I can leave. So that's one thing for Brett.

So Brett, we finally managed to get Brett into a place at UPS, just around three years ago, coming up in November. And it has been really great journey from there. He has melded well to the team there, and, unfortunately, they're not able to be here today. We just couldn't get the logistics to work out to get them on. But we have a video that we'll be showing later about it and -- yeah.

In terms of how we've been supporting Brett on the job, it's similar to how we support Bridget but definitely more involved. So we have -- Brett is fully able to do his job. He's a valuable asset to UPS, and he's one of their -- when he's working, he's moving, one of the fastest in those trucks. And there are times when I get there an hour later, and he's almost finished with his second truck, and these are big trucks, nothing to scoff at. So when we typically come later in the day and stay until the end of his shift, simply because as we all do, as the day goes on, it -- to do the work. And as he's grown at UPS, he's made great connections, and we'll see that on the video. So, Pam, do you want to add anything?

PAMELA: A couple things before we end with the video. In this Brett's case, Bridget's case, and most everyone, it's finding the right fit, the right environment. It's going through what is that person's strength, their contribution, their competency, and making it work-- and really looking hard and wide, for the right environment, the right natural support and right people and the right taste for activities and the right everything. I call it an art and dance. There are methods and routine ways we go about business, but you have to tailor and customize every situation. And it really is a team of people, and all of the success stories and all of the ones, all of them out there, it takes a while to work, a lot of people and conversation. And it's beautiful when it culminates in the success stories we're showing today. But it's an art and dance, what I like to say. And it's finding the right job for the right person at the right time. You might be working with a business, and they're interested but not ready to hire. Sometimes the relationships go on for years before it turns into a job for someone and that you have the right person for them. So it's a perfect match, comes with a lot that makes it happen. So just wanted to add that in there in conclusion. I think we have enough time to show Brett's movie.

ZACHARY: Yeah, in this video, we're going to be showing you, Brett is going to talk about -- Brett and his job coach will talk about his work. As well, you'll hear testimony from his current coworkers, and you'll see a little bit of him at work doing what he's doing. And what he's great at. If you can play the video, please.

(video playing).

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ZACHARY: Thank you. All right, so yeah, that's Brett. I think that speaks for itself. Sarah, can we pass it back over to you.

SARAH: Absolutely. Thank you guys for joining. Wow! I couldn't take notes fast enough. Thank you so much to all of our panelists for sharing your stories and insights. The Departments of Commerce and Labor, partnered to identify what makes a job a good job. And together they came up with something called the Good Jobs Principles, and there are eight, to create a framework for workers, businesses and labor unions, and advocates and researchers, and state and local governments and federal agencies for a

shared vision of job quality-- including recruiting and hiring; benefits; diversity, equity and inclusion, and accessibility, or DEIA; empowerment representation; job security and working conditions; and organizational culture; and skills; and career advancement. And I kept making connections back to the Good Jobs Principles. When Shannon spoke about Larry with South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation, I noticed how they assisted Larry and W International employer to create a safe and effective working environment that allowed Larry to retain employment for over two years, and I took away from hearing his story, this is a good job for him because he's receiving pay and benefits that allow him to no longer rely on Social Security Benefits. That's huge.

And when Steve spoke, I was struck by how prioritizing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility when hiring people with disabilities, he mentioned it helped benefit them and said his business has grown as a result. That's another important thing.

Matthew and Bridget-- five and a half years-- I don't know many people working today for more than five and a half years; that's incredible. That sort of longevity. And, Matt, I was struck by how you described, because Bridget is there, it's improved your organizational culture. And by being inclusive and hiring people with disabilities, it's made them good jobs, and that's incredible. And hearing Brett's video, one thing I know about UPS, it's a union job, which is fantastic; and I don't know if you are aware, but people with disabilities benefit from union membership more than any other group of people, and there's research about that from the Center for Economic and Policy Research. But I noticed with Brett, again, great organizational culture. You can tell it's a good job. His coworkers value him, and he's made the business there improve. The way that he works, and that is again, another one of the good job principles. So just amazing to me, and thank you guys for joining us today.

So I'm really excited to introduce something new to you that's going to be available on the LEAD Center website and hopefully given to you guys in the chat. It's a fact sheet called "People with Disabilities and the Good Jobs Principles." And this fact sheet talks about how you can learn about how the Investing in America Agenda is bringing dollars in federal investments to create jobs in infrastructure, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing and empowering employers to intentionally recruit, train, retain, and promote people in ways that are accessible to all job seekers, including those with disabilities. And it's got a lot of resources—for a lot of people asking how they can receive the assistance we talked about today, there's resources listed.

And the best part: the fact sheet is just the beginning. We at the LEAD Center have been selecting success stories of individuals with disabilities from across the country successfully trained and hired into good jobs, and we're going to be sharing those stories soon along with the fact sheet on the LEAD Center website. And these stories are sure to inspire employers, as well as demonstrate how people from across the country with all kinds of disabilities and from all different backgrounds are successfully working in good jobs across multiple industries. So please stay tuned for that. Check out the fact sheet and download it, share it with others.

So I think we have a few more minutes left. So we can answer questions, and we've got a lot of questions. So thank you so much to everyone who submitted a question. If you have one, feel free to stick it in the Q & A. We'll do the best we can in the time we

have. I think Shannon, should be able to answer this question: how would a business connect with vocational rehabilitation to find qualified applicants?

SHANNON: The one thing: just reach out to a vocational rehabilitation. In South Carolina, we have about 30 in different counties. Each state is different. Reach out and make a call to the company, to voc. rehab. and let them know what you're looking for. And sometimes, we can take a tour of your business and see the needs and talk to H.R. or the managers to find out what you're looking for. And from there, we go back to our offices and share that information, and the counselors or training center managers will know who would be a good fit and set up an interview and go from there.

SARAH: Thank you, Shannon. And a head's up, to plug back to the Good Jobs Initiative fact sheet, we have a directory to help you locate the vocational rehabilitation in your state and area. So much. What are other questions in here that we could answer? How can employers receive assistance with workplace learning or on-the-job training? I know, Shannon, talked a little bit about Larry's story how he received on-the-job training and how can employers connect with that?

SHANNON: It's reaching out to the local voc. rehab. and talking to them about that. We look at the individual skills, and if the individual doesn't have the skills we see what we can do with assisting with paying for that individual to take place with an on-the-job training program. With the program, usually -- the individual is covered under workman's comp and helps the company feel better knowing we have the backup. And it depends on the company, the job, and individual, what is needed. And the thing is just to reach out to a voc. rehab. And we can set up on-the-job training for the individual. On average, do about 10 weeks where we assist with paying for the individual to go through training in hopes of them to receive employment after that. And what we also share with the individual and the company once they're hired, we still follow them for 90 to 120 days to make sure things are still working out well.

SARAH: Awesome. Thank you, Shannon. So another question on here: Are there best practices -- and I think any one of the panel can answer-- are there best practices how to talk to potential employers who may be nervous in hiring people with disabilities?

MATTHEW: This is this Matt. I'm happy to answer. The important part of this is just talk. You find out what is needed. What jobs are they hiring for? And break it down by what they think a job needs. Generally speaking, we think that jobs are out of the reach of someone because we don't understand -- we see someone whom we assume has limited capabilities without understanding what the capabilities are. And it's the visual cue: someone in a wheelchair or someone who doesn't walk the way we do or maybe talk the way we do. And we assume there are all of these limitations that go along with that. And in truth, we're all limited, and we just don't see it because we don't have those visual cues all the time.

And so it's finding a way to say, take that aside, put them behind that curtain and talk to them so you don't have those visual cues. I think it's hard to do that, but at the same time, if you don't tackle it head on, you probably are going to struggle with it indefinitely. Pam, you have a lot of expertise doing that.

PAMELA: I would say, it's the initial conversation, the meeting, the peer -- like Matt and other employers when you see other people are hiring people, and it's successful for

their business. It's that peer pressure and word of mouth. I came from sales and marketing, and the better we do this, the more people-- their ears are opened. And it's another reason why we feature people on LinkedIn and try to show the world how successful this is every chance we can because it opens people's minds. And once you get their mind open, it paves the way for the conversation on the ground.

TRICIA: I wanted to chime in. Creating the relationships with employers, piggybacking off Pam and Matt. Absolutely. And showing that you have a candidate that has really good skills, that they may apply inside of the business and creating that relationship. And doing the work site tours and doing work-based assessments inside of those businesses. That seals a lot of deals so to speak. For employers to say, oh, I can see them doing this. Yeah. It's great.

PAMELA: I think when you demonstrate you're there to help business, it translates into jobs.

TRICIA: Businesses like to explain where their needs and backlogs are, and if you have a good candidate that has the skills to do that, it's going to be a great partnership. And that's a great thing for the people we support.

SARAH: That's awesome. Great answers. Looks like we're right about at 3:30, so if you can go to the next slide. I want to thank you so much for joining us. I hope you found this conversation as informative and rich as I have. Please, visit us at LEAD.org and sign up for notifications and check out the fact sheet, download, and share it. We hope you have a great rest of your day. Thank you for joining. Bye.