>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Good afternoon! My name is Philip Kahn-Pauli. I am the Policy and Practices Director for RespectAbility, and I'm so excited to be here with you today with the really innovative thought leaders from the Kennedy Krieger Institute to share their insights, their ideas, their lessons learned on neurodiversity, collaboration and transition success for youth with disabilities. I am glad to have all of you here in our audience, both on Zoom and also via Facebook Live. I do apologize we are having some technical difficulties here. We have we are short an ASL interpreter -- and our captioner is just getting set up now. Our ASL is now here, but we're gonna have to work with the live transcript from Zoom, I do apologize. But if you need any other accessibility help, we will do what we can to accommodate you now, and we will be posting recordings of this webinar online on RespectAbility's website shortly afterwards. So first and foremost, I'm so excited to have all of our panelists here. And I will say, you know, neurodiversity is one of those topics which is getting a lot more attention these days. People are talking about people on the autism spectrum, people who think differently, who have really incredible value to bring to employers. And in a time when the labor force participation rate for working age people with disabilities is actually higher than it was before the pandemic, more people with disabilities are engaging in the workforce, and more importantly, employers are hungry for talent. They are hungry for the insights, the ideas, the imagination that people with disabilities bring to the workforce. And so we're going to be digging in pretty deep on that aspect of it today. I'm so excited to be introducing you to – and I'm gonna go from left to right and I will probably not capture everyone's credentials, I apologize but we got some very well educated and very hard working folks with us here today. I'm excited to introduce first Stacey Herman, who's the Director of Neurodiversity and Community Workforce Development at the Kennedy Krieger Institute here in Maryland. Her role includes the creation and supervision of programs designed to support people with disabilities as they transition to the workforce and access their community. She is the president of the Maryland chapter of the association of people supporting employment first. I am a big fan of her lunch and learn sessions, which you should join. You should also join your local APSE chapter and be part of advocacy at the ground level to drive for greater competitive integrated employment. Likewise, Stacey has served as an appointed member of the interagency transition council for youth with disabilities, and the governor's workforce development board here in Maryland. I am – as I mentioned, she has, you know, a lot of really impressive credentials, graduating from Syracuse with degrees in Inclusion, Elementary and special education, Master's of science and special ed from Johns Hopkins. She is widely recognized as a thought leader on these issues. Likewise, we have Tina Schmitt who is the talent acquisition and retention manager for Kennedy Krieger. She has degrees from Towson University, as well as certifications from the society for human resource management. And she has incredible experience that she brings to connecting with the workforce and connecting with the incredible talent acquisition program that Kennedy Krieger runs. Lastly and certainly not least, we have Dr. Rebecca Colangelo who's been a special ed teacher at Kennedy Krieger High School for many years. But in her time she's served on various committees and support systems to really drive home impacts in Maryland. She has graduated from the University of Delaware with a degree in social science studies education, a Master's in special ed, and she picked up a PhD in educational leadership from Drexel. So we have some very incredibly educated folks here today, people who are more than just being educated in the complexities of special education issues, people who are really profoundly passionate on different neurodiversity issues and to really get more incredibly talented people with disabilities into the workforce. And so with that I'm going to turn over to the Kennedy Krieger team. What do you have to teach us today and what can we learn from you and the incredible work that you're doing?

>> Stacey Herman: Thank you Philip. Well, we are very excited to be here today with you and everyone else on this webinar. I'm Stacy Herman, as Philip said, and I'm here with Dr. Rebecca Colangelo, who's our assistant director of our meaningful community services, and of course Tina Schmitt, who's our director of talent acquisition. So we're excited to get started. I'm going to just share my screen. We're going to start with a brief presentation about who we are, transition, our service delivery, and then talking about what you can do about breaking down barriers and how we've done that at the institute through our hiring pathways program. All right. Hoping everyone can see my screen? So if you can just in the chat please introduce yourself. We want to know where you're from, your location, your organization, your role, anything you'd like to share with us, please put that in the chat box. We'd love to know who you are and where you're from. So for today, we're going to talk about who we are, what we're doing at Kennedy Krieger Institute to increase employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. We're going to just briefly mention about the movement, talk a little bit about facts, which I'm sure you all know, how do we create a meaningful transition from school to adulthood. We're going to talk about some strategies for success. We're going to talk about those barriers to employment, and what we're doing to break down those barriers, and sharing with other businesses. Talk about provider collaborations - how can businesses and adult service agencies collaborate as talent pipelines to increase employment outcomes. And then of course most importantly, you're going to hear from some of our community members. We can't always have -- members of our community with us at all these presentations, but we have videos and stories that we love to share. So we can give you really great success stories and examples. And with all of our presentations and webinars and trainings, this is a safe space, so please, ask questions in the chat. It's okay, it doesn't have to be pc. We want questions, we want comments, we want you engaged. And this is all a very safe space to have this discussion. Change happens when you have these type of discussions. So Kennedy Krieger Institute - who are we? Just really at a glance, we are now about 80 interdisciplinary programs with about 2,700 employees at the institute. And we are a research center, we have school programs, we have in and out patient centers, and then of course to highlight, we have our Neurodiversity at Work program which you're going to learn a lot about. So neurodiversity: what is neurodiversity? A lot of us probably on this call hear that term. So Kennedy Krieger Institute really took a look at this term, and we came up with a very broad definition. So we define neurodiversity as a broad range of neurological differences. It endows an individual with unique skills, abilities and talents. And that these differences are embraced and respected in the workplace at home and in the community. And we say broad, because that term can sometimes be discussed as just individuals with autism, but broadly we're looking at individuals who might have dyslexia, ADHD, it could even be mental health. So we wanted to be as broad as possible, because we're serving and working with a person. So this movement, we hear about the movement, we hear about the neurodiversity movement. There's a lot of programs out there, we need a lot of people. We need everyone working together across the country to be able to work in a collaboration so that individuals of all abilities can be part of the workforce. And it's really a way for individuals to enter the labor force, and we're transforming our ecosystem. That is crucial right now as we think about the state of our country, economic growth, the recruitment needs of businesses - this is the time to transform our workplaces. And just a basic -- down to the basic of most basic facts. As many of you probably know 80 percent of individuals with disabilities are not part of the workforce right now. And it's a little bit higher in the pandemic numbers. And everyone should have the right and the dignity to be part of the workforce, if they want to work and be a productive member of society. And these are just some really basic rate facts from Drexel University, thinking about from school to work on employment outcomes. So when we think about a learning disability, we know that many --that's invisible, you always can't see that. That is a much higher rate of employment than when you look at autism and the rate of into individuals with autism who are obtaining employment. So who are we at Kennedy Krieger Institute, and what are we doing at Kennedy Krieger? How are we working towards increasing employment outcomes and community engagement for individuals with disabilities? Well, our Neurodiversity at Work program takes a multi-faceted approach to hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities as part of the workforce and part of their community. And our design -- is through a collective impact model. I'm going to talk a little bit about that on the next slide. And the focus is person centered. So it's a collaborative -- it's supporting an individual in all facets of their adult lifespan. You know, you're thinking 21 and up at that point. And as we think about our collaboration, Kennedy Krieger's mission is based on interdisciplinary approaches. And we approach neurodiversity work that exact same way: bringing together our human resources department, our school programs, our adult programs, our Maryland center for developmental disabilities, our marketing and PR. And then what you'll see is the 25 other departments who work with us on our Project Search program. So we have to do this together. But it also brings together community agencies, individuals with disabilities, and as many people as possible. So our HR pathways hiring program – and Tina is going to talk a little bit about that later, a little bit more – but ultimately it's a modified hiring process for individuals with disabilities at our own organization, at Kennedy Krieger, where we're matching talent and skill to a position at the organization. Our meaningful community services programs are our direct support service programs. So we are in Maryland a developmental disabilities licensed agency. So your DD provider, depending on the state that you are in, here in Maryland it's the Developmental Disabilities Administration. And we are a licensed agency serving individuals in their community and focus on employment via behavioral supports. We do this 100 percent in the community. Our programs are community-based. You're going to hear some strategies later on how we do that. And we really are focusing, again, on each person's journey. It's their life, we are here to support and support in their journey. And then we have Project Search, which many of you might know is an international model. If you do know please put it in the chat, thumbs up if you know Project Search. There are over 600 sites internationally, and there are 14 in the state of Maryland. Maryland is very collaborative in its Project Search programs. We work together, we host roundtable, we have conferences, we share strategies, our Project Search interns have meet and greets, we visit each other's sites. So working together to increase employment outcomes on a larger scale in Maryland. That program is a 10-month transition to work program, and it's hosted by a business. It's collaborative with a school program and a provider. At Kennedy Krieger Institute, we are all three programs. And then we also have our education and training, since one of my favorite parts that I get to do is I get to go out to businesses and work with those businesses and train on hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities as part of their workforce. We also do training in other areas. When we think about virtual support services and community-based programming. And then, again, it's about doing this as a collaborative and a collective impact, so bringing together state agencies, individuals with disabilities, businesses and universities – all coming together with a common -- looking at a common challenge and finding common solutions. So here's just a nice overview of our programs. When we think about our DORS services, through your Voc rehab, depending on the state you're in, and just gives you kind of an idea of where we are and how we serve across the state of Maryland. So as far as our programs go, when we're thinking about our Project Search, as I mentioned, it's a 10-month transition to work program for individuals in their last year of school or just after they graduated. It is a based in full workplace immersion across departments at the Institute. And then CORE foundations is really helping a person in their adult life. And this image that we have here is a young adult who was an intern at our international center for spinal cord injury, and he is there working as a tech in his internship. I’m going to pass it over to Dr. Rebecca Colangelo.

>> Rebecca Colangelo: Sure, so I can hop in here. So these are all of the different departments that we have at Kennedy Krieger that we are collaborating with. And what's been really unique as part of the pandemic, those organizations that you see highlighted in purple, they are in fact community business partners outside of Kennedy Krieger. So you know, COVID has caused all of us to be unique and creative in our service delivery models, and we're very grateful that we've been able to find reliable community business partners, in addition to all of the wonderful departments at Kennedy Krieger that provide such meaningful experience for all of our Project Search interns. So thinking about our interdisciplinary approach. These are some departments at Kennedy Krieger that have started working with interns in Project Search, but then have also, you know, seen success in those interns, and, you know, found them to be very valuable members of their workforce and have continued to support them beyond just their Project Search programming. And the departments on this slide range from -- you see nursing, to human resources, some more of those acronyms, you know, PR I think everyone may know, POG is a self-advocacy group that stands for people on the go, and MCDD is our Maryland center for developmental disabilities.

>> Stacey Herman: And these programs are coming together along with the community partners. So when we think about -- you might call them case managers in your state, coordinators of community service is. what we call them in Maryland, support brokers, family caregivers, and of course your state agency, whether that's DORS or DDA. So when a lot of organizations -- when you're within your school or different programs, you're really just within your organization. Our teams go far beyond that, because you need to bring everyone together for that person-centered approach. And then as I mentioned, we were going to come back to collective impact model, and what is a collective impact model. And I wish I had a -- this image, you could see it 3D, unfortunately I'm not able to show you 3D. But this is our network. So we're central with our Neurodiversity at Work, and these are all the partners. So when you saw there were 85 businesses on that slide earlier, and our different counties and the different state agencies, this kind of gives you a representation. if I were to do that now -- this is a little bit older -- if I were to do that now, we probably would be more -- probably a little more than -- one and a half of what you're seeing here, because our businesses have continued to grow so much throughout the pandemic. When you think about a collective impact model, which is how our Neurodiversity at Work program is designed, we are coming together for a common agenda. We have, you know, we're thinking about how are we going to make progress. We continue to think about mutual reinforcing activities, have lots of communication, and being able to be in my role as the president of the Maryland chapter of APSE, leading the Project Search groups in the state of Maryland and working on all the different committees and board, allows me to be in a central area of, you know, central opportunity to work with these agencies and bring people together to collaborate, to make change. And then you really have to have that backbone. So we see ourselves as that backbone focusing on solutions, and wanting to share all those solutions and best practices. So when we think about just our program in general, of the people we are directly serving, we wanted to share with you some of the numbers. We track a lot of data and we think about it as meaningful experiences. We wanted -- you might want to be in paid employment, maybe you're in job development, maybe you just want to volunteer. And every experience is valuable as long as it's meaningful and it's an important part of your life. So looking at our stats right now, everyone really is in our program in a meaningful opportunity. And we also started tracking in the pandemic is when paid employment was offered but ultimately was declined, and we keep track of reasons for that decline too. So we have a lot of people who are back out in their volunteer sites. We have a small group of people looking at -- who are in job development, and then our paid employment -- we just had three offers this week so that percentage is going to go way up, and I shouldn't say we, but people in our community have three offers. So we're really starting to see people who are interested in having a diverse talent and -- people within their organizations who have all different skill sets.

>> Rebecca Colangelo: So thinking about how we can create this meaningful transition. You know, the first things that come to mind are the community members and individuals themselves, and really starting with school teams at an early age to help create these meaningful transitions. And yes, you know, all states have mandated IEP ages that you need to start talking about transition, usually around, like, 13 to 15. But instead of just having that conversation once a year at your IEP meeting, what can we be doing as educators to make sure that school teams and services are really helping to support independence for individuals with disabilities, but then also, how can adult service agencies and other community partners really help the process to create this smooth transition from school to adult services? Because, you know, we talk about individuals getting lost -- in the cracks or falling off the cliff, or a lot of terms that are used to describe this time. And we want to be working together to not create those kinds of situations, and to create this smooth transition. So some of our tips are listed on the next slide, which include really focusing on that person-centered approach. So thinking about an IEP team, moving it to a IP or PCP, you know, states have different acronyms. So taking that same model of an IEP, but then really focusing on what is the person's individual goals, and how can we, in a community setting or in a workplace setting, create those natural supports that help promote that independence? And a lot of that comes down to making sure that we are communicating with all team members. And so team members may be moms, dads, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, you know, and they may be therapists, they may still be people from their school teams, you know, just making sure that that communication is clear. And then really utilizing programs that are out there to not only promote independence but also be able to provide those types of -- to provide those types of meaningful experiences for individuals with disabilities. So things like the Project Search programs, which Stacey had mentioned are, you know, a international program, I'm sure. And I saw on the chat all the different people who were saying -- they've either had a son or daughter in a Project Search program currently, working with, but there's other programs that follow a similar model. So making sure that we're connecting individuals out of school with those types of programs. But also really promoting those work-based learning opportunities when an individual still is in high school. And sometimes this does fall a little bit on the families, but, you know, by having those communications with your school teams, and looking at adult service providers sooner rather than later, can just help to broaden this collaborative approach. And it also helps you to see what other resources are out there, like, what's listed towards the bottom of this slide with DORS services or any kind of VR services in another state - they can help to fill in the gaps. And you know, our last tip for creating a meaningful transition is, you know, honestly, you just gotta get creative. And as providers we get very creative, but we've also seen, you know, community members really think outside the box and their families really think outside the box to help broaden these meaningful experiences and help create this smooth transition. And another thing which we'll mention on this slide is a lot of that comes with, kind of, working with families to fade school supports. You know part of the cliff or the, you know, getting lost in the cracks is that the way our education system is set up is not the way that, you know, the real world is. And unfortunately for individuals with more severe disabilities, families and the individuals themselves can become very reliant on the OT therapies that happen twice a week, and, you know, meeting with a speech pathologist in single sessions and group sessions each week. So again, starting this conversation early that yes, these supports may be necessary in a school setting, and yes, we are not encouraging that we drop that one-on-one just because, you know, we're headed to graduation. But really thinking, you know, are these the best related services to support an individual in experiencing more independence, and experiencing a more meaningful workplace setting or community setting? And a lot of this comes kind of in that early stage of transition. You know, talking with your school teams, talking with the family's comfortability too. And all of this leads right into kind of what we are doing at Kennedy Krieger. But first, a couple of discussion questions. So you can feel free to just leave your answers in the chat here. But as we continue the rest of this presentation, we do want to know, you know, what successes have you encountered either personally or with the families that you've been working during this transitional phase? And then also, you know, what are some big barriers that either you yourself or, you know, you as a family member or working with families have experienced during this transitional phase too? So feel free, throw them in the chat. We just like to get that perspective. So what are we doing with meeting full community services, as Stacey mentioned? So our unique twist on adult services is that we are 100 percent community based. So we are going to come and meet you in your neighborhood, and if there is a job opportunity that we need to help get you to, that's what our staff are going to do. And we take a very person-centered approach that has a very structured meeting process too. You know, we're going through orientation meetings, we're going through, I mentioned the acronym -- PCP meetings, which stands for person-centered plan, but we're going through a very organized meeting process so that we are keeping all of the stakeholders informed. And part of that meeting process, I mentioned the orientation meeting, but then we're also having another 30-day meeting after your services have begun, just to make sure that the community member is feeling supported. But then also, you know, the family -- is on board with services as well as a CCS or any other provider at that point too. And our hybrid model really incorporates both job development and community development strategies, which we'll get to on this slide. So as far as employment goes, really what we are doing that's, you know, beyond just the resume building and -- you know, filling out job applications, things of that nature, is we are really trying to get out into the community to go on informal interviews. You know, showing up, making sure that we're reserving some time to talk with a leader in an organization, and then, you know, gather that information, see what kind of openings there are. We're also very good at prepping our individuals through the mock interview process, so making sure that they're practicing the answers to the questions that they're gonna have to answer. And then also thinking outside the box, you know, we know that we are in a workforce crisis and that businesses are strapped for opportunities, and, you know, they need help but may not have the means to pay someone, so can we create some job shadowing opportunities or can we look at an unpaid internship opportunity? And then as far as community development goes, this is really looking at volunteer opportunities in an individual's neighborhood or community, but then also thinking about how can we help this individual access their community, thinking about those sensory strategies that an individual may need to do travel training, or to, you know, go into a crowded museum. And then also making sure to incorporate some very person-centered activities focusing on an individual's goals. And then on this next slide, we have kind of two fun models that will show you kind of everything that I just talked about as far as strategies. One focuses very much on the community development and things that we look to incorporate with that community member's schedule. And then the other one focusing on employment. And so then, the next question that always comes up is, you know, how did COVID impact our services? And just like everyone else's adult services and school services, we had to, you know, immediately shift to a virtual model. So we got very creative 18-19 months ago, however long it's been. And you know, we started making sure that we had virtual speakers coming to talk to the community members. We started doing online cooking, which was a really neat experience, you can see in these pictures, these community members made some cookies, it looks like. We started finding opportunities to go on virtual field trips to some museums in the area or, you know, even things that weren't in our area thanks to Google Maps. So it was really a very collaborative effort that -- we found new business partners and just did our best to continue to create an innovative experience for our community members until we could get back out there. And so that's kind of where we are now. And thinking about kind of our takeaways for service delivery, which are coming up on our next slide for you here, are -- you know, there's three main ones. And the first one really to the structure organization of meaningful community services is that consistency is key. Like, we do our best to keep our community member schedules individualized but also as consistent as possible. And the same thing goes with how those services are delivered and, you know, the staff members that are delivering them. So we really make sure that that we do our best to keep that reliable so that it meets the community members' needs, and that if there are going to be any changes with the schedules, we try to give that notification as early as possible and work through some of those challenges with team members. Which brings us right to our next point: work as a team. You know, through this process of building meaningful community services, we've learned, you know, teams don't just include community members, families, adult service providers, they can run the gamut of who is included with your team. So making sure that -- all team members -- there's clear communication with all team members, but also making sure that those team member responsibilities are defined. We really do a good job during our orientation meetings and any of our information sessions, you know, clearly defining what our roles are as the providers, but also letting the community members and individuals that we serve know these are our expectations for them. And same thing with the family members too, because everyone plays a different role in helping to create these meaningful and successful opportunities. And finally, collaborate. You know, if I had a nickel for every time we've said collaborate already in the past 40 minutes. But yeah, you have to collaborate and you have to, you know, see what else is out there in your networks that's really going to help to, you know, broaden the horizons for individuals with disabilities and provide those more meaningful opportunities that will allow for greater independence. So I'm going to kick things over to Tina now.

>> Tina Schmitt: Tank you so much Becca, and just ending on that that collaboration concept, you know, I feel so fortunate to be able to collaborate with Stacey and Becca on a regular basis. Again, they're service providers and I'm an HR person. So at this point in the presentation I'm going to start talking a little bit about what I’ve done from an HR perspective to really transform the hiring process at Kennedy Krieger so that we're more welcoming. So the first thing and kind of my baby is the HR pathways program. And this is designed to be a welcoming and accessible model of hiring for people with disabilities. So what I set out to do, you know, I realized that from an HR perspective our organization was pretty inclusive, right? We are in the business of treating individuals with disabilities. But when I took a really -- a fine-tooth comb and a microscope to look at our policies and procedures, I did notice that there were some things that were not as welcoming as they could be. So one of the first things I did with the HR pathways program was to create an offering for individuals with disabilities for the talent acquisition team to sit with a candidate with a disability who was interested in employment at Kennedy Krieger. And we provided a meet and greet. So this is kind of a step before a formal interview process. So what we offer is a sit-down, a Zoom meeting, a phone call to talk with the candidate. Many times a candidate with a disability might not even have a resume. So we wanted to talk through with the candidate, maybe the adult service provider or the parent as well. Talk through what that person's skills and qualifications are and perhaps what their career interests are. And this meeting is so incredibly enlightening for me as a recruiter and for my recruitment team. So you know, this speaks to looking beyond the resume, right, which we're all trying to ask employers to do, that this person is is capable of doing so much more than what you see on that resume. So through this meet and greet, we're able to gather all of that information. And then our talent acquisition team is able to suggest certain careers for the individual. And that has really been a successful technique for us. We also took a look at our application screening and interview process. We have trained some of our hiring managers to do alternative interviews, so we have provided them some other strategies to use when maybe sitting face to face with a candidate and just firing off questions and getting a textbook answer back is not the most efficient way to determine if someone can do the job. So we have encouraged our managers to offer job trials, for an example. Hey, this candidate is interested in the scanning project, has the skills and qualifications, let's have them come in and practice the job in front of the hiring manager, right? Instead of asking the candidate to explain how they would do scanning, let's watch them do scanning. So that has been really life-changing, I think, for our inclusion efforts. We've also suggested traveling interviews. So some of our managers will walk around with the candidate and have an informal conversation about what the job is. And that releases a lot of anxiety on the job seeker's part from, again, that traditional interview that HR professionals have always relied so heavily on a sophisticated social skill set. And that's typically what HR professionals have looked for in the past, right? It's like the interview process is, you know, typically people that make it through the interview process are those that can articulate really well or have the right textbook answers again. And really, we know from an HR perspective that is not going to tell us who is best at the job. And then finally, a huge piece of the HR pathways program is educating our community businesses, educating students in local and college universities who are studying HR, and who are studying businesses. And also internal with our own supervisors and hiring managers. I think that in order for a successful disability hiring program to work, it takes the entire HR department to be on board and to be supportive of everyone in the process. And you know, part of the reason why we designed the HR pathways program was because we're very well aware that there are significant barriers to employment. So the lack of transportation is huge, and I'm sure most of the people on this meeting are very well aware that that is such a huge barrier to candidates with disabilities. Either they may not have a license, the transportation support in their community might not be reliable. So we do know that that is significant. The stigma of a disability is huge, right? That exists in every organization, even Kennedy Krieger. To self-disclose or not self-disclose, right? There are organizations such as Kennedy Krieger - we welcome self-disclosure. And we want employees to come to HR and say listen, I have a disability. I would like an accommodation in the interview process. What can you offer for me? But there are plenty of organizations out there that may not be as welcoming, may not be as inclusive, so there's always that balance. Do I self-disclose? Do I not? And really it comes down to maybe the culture of that organization. Again, I said we had to make significant changes to our interview process. That's, again, a huge barrier, particularly for those with an autism spectrum disorder. The interview process is something that may be too unbearable to get through, and that, you know, really stops the job search at that point. Individuals with disabilities may not have the experience that an applicant tracking system is looking for. So now, we're in an environment where organizations are using these electronic systems to screen your resume before you even get to a recruiter. And individuals with disabilities may not get even past that part. So that's another piece employers really need to take a close look at. A pure lack of understanding and respect exists in many organizations, we know that. Behaviors have been a challenge for us in the past. I think that, you know, individuals that have significant behaviors in the workplace is a major barrier and something that I know Stacey and Becca work on on a daily basis for their team. Communication, getting managers on board, looking at policies and procedures across the board, you know, I realized very quickly at -- when we really started aggressively hiring for individuals with disabilities that every single job description in my organization required a high school diploma. Now does every job -- should every job require a high school diploma? Not necessarily. And so we really had to go back, look at all of the job qualifications for our jobs and think does this job -- can someone be successful in this job without a diploma? Absolutely. And we found a long list of jobs and careers that we were able to dramatically change those requirements. And that is necessary if we're going to move forward. Employers who are not inclusive, and then social skills -- we all know that those are pretty big barriers as well. So a few strategies that we've used at Kennedy Krieger that really helped gain success in our hiring efforts, number one being finding an executive champion. So for those of you that are here and you're in organizations - you might be an HR professional, you might be a job support professional - one key thing is to find someone in a senior leadership role who is able to and willing to provide the buy-in and the support that you need to gain ground in this effort. And I'm telling you right now, the rate at which children and adolescents are being diagnosed with autism, I can almost guarantee you that in every single organization, you will be able to find somebody that can back your efforts and to back your strategy. It's really important to connect that senior leader and get them to be your champion. Another thing is self-disclosure: it's not going to work in every organization but it works in ours, and we continue to work on ours. Still not everybody's going to be willing to do that, but we want to create a safe environment so that they will. And I talked already a little bit about our screening and interviewing. Again, that needs to be changed dramatically in order to be truly inclusive of those with disabilities. From an HR perspective, I can tell you that the average accommodation is $500 per employee. $500. That is not a significant amount of money by any means. So if any HR professional or any manager or supervisor is going to say to you "well, what are we going to do about accommodations? I don't have any money in my budget. How am I going to handle that?" It's $500, for the most part, and many of the reasonable accommodations on this list cost nothing! Think about the lighting in our environments. Most of our offices have neon lights. Okay, neon lights bother me, so think about your employees with neurodiverse conditions, right? We can change lightings. We can create awareness for more remote work. We can create awareness and be supportive of flexible work hours. These things do not cost our business anything! We can provide a mentor or peer support on the job. So these are things that are very easy to accommodate and most employers will be open to it. We also know that a supportive supervisor is critical to each and every employee with a disability's success. I can't say enough how important it is that supervisors are supportive -- and again, this is when HR departments can come into play and truly support that supervisor. But these are some of the things that we've noticed at Kennedy Krieger as being incredibly successful supervising strategies. The first one is extended training time. Again, costs very little, takes very little effort and budget -- from the business side. Let's build in an extra two weeks so that this employee really is able to gain the concepts that we're training, right? And giving some patience. Maybe providing some modeling. Maybe changing our communication style a little bit. But there are some strategies for supervisors, and again, I can't say this enough - that supervisor is so critical to the success. And I will turn it over to Stacey.

>> Stacey Herman: Hi everyone, thank you Tina. And as we -- just to kind of wrap out our area when we're thinking about the processes and being inclusive in our workplace, we also want to think about those communication strategies. They really are key. You can't just ask a question and think everyone is going to be able to respond, and that's with anyone. So keep making sure you're giving choices. You know, if you have a task list for the day, and you are going to choose from three things you are going to do in the morning and three in the afternoon, supervisors, or colleagues, or mentors, whoever that person is in the workplace for you - give choices. Say do you want to start with data entry or do you want to start with filing? Give those choices to help the communication. Utilize visual supports. Wait time -- I did a training yesterday and I just asked a question, probably waited a good 30 seconds to the random the person who was there responded, and I gave that example of it's okay, it's not awkward, you have to have time to process and then you have to have time to be able to decide what you're going to say and then say it. So 30 seconds to a minute - especially individuals with assistive technology devices - you have to give that person time. If you're consistently asking the same question over and over again, you're not giving that person an opportunity to either type their response or verbally respond to you. You have to be mindful of facial expressions and body language. This goes both ways. You have to be able to read someone's facial expression and body language. Are they sharing that they're happy? Are they sad? Someone we work with she has limited verbal communication but you could tell by her face if she's happy, if she's sad. That's how she responds a lot. But you have to be conscious of your body language. How many of us are really frustrated and our cameras are off on a zoom and we're listening to the same thing and we roll our eyes, right? Well if you -- what if you do that? Then you're sending a message to somebody, well, I don't really care about this conversation and that's not creating positive work environment. And then we have our cell phones. One of the best possible tools that we have available to us is our cell phones, because it's a way to look up images. If you have --you're having difficulty communicating with one another, let's look at pictures and just Google it. Maybe you have to type something out within the cell phone or that you need to use the speech to text. There are so many capabilities on that phone that we have readily at our fingertips. So I know that we are going to save some time for questions and Philip has some questions. So I am going to move to two more slides to wrap us up here, and then I will be able to send you these links. And I'm sure that Becca can actually get Johns' story and put it in the chat. This is just a great story about John and his podcast, so one of our community members that we like to share. And then I want everyone just to know that we use an online data system, and our practices are very data driven. So we look at all different areas of the job development process. We look at industries. We look at -- from start to finish of when an application -- we began the exploration all the way to interview obtained or job obtained or declined, to really looking at longitudinal data on employment outcomes. We also track data on all community members' individual goals and different areas for each person. So I'm going to have you hear Tyler, and then we will close out with one final slide after Tyler and get to those questions. But I think it's important -- and I'm going to skip ahead. In the beginning Tyler -- this is from his graduation speech of Project Search. He shares about his experience in security and talks about what he learned and the skills that he was doing. But it's his message at the end to everyone that I really want for all of you to hear.

>> Tyler Shallue: I have had many supports in my life who I believe and continue to hold to help me persevere, reach my potential goals, and help me pursue my dreams. I also want to -- I wanted to shout out to my school and the school for the blind, because they've made such a tremendous impact on who I am and who I am and as a person who I want to be, and just -- it just couldn't have been done without anyone. And I would also like to thank my parents who helped me join Project Search to help me understand. And to those out there in society who feel afraid or feel worried about what their future is like for them, let me just say this: you are not alone. You have your whole life -- ahead of you to think about what your dreams are. And it is your -- and this is a wonderful opportunity. This world presents a lot of wonderful opportunities. Despite your challenges, we are all in this journey together. We are all on this journey together. We will get through our challenges, and it will be a great accomplishment once we do reach those big milestones that await us. Thank you everyone for all your support.

>> Stacey Herman: So I always think it's important to have our community members share their stories. But really, Tyler is someone that has great experience. He has a great team around him, and he's really found success. And he wants to advocate and he wants to share with others. And I do agree Kate, it's a great speech and it's a great way to hear from Tyler, from someone who experienced Project Search. But he had his school -- he was at school and came to us. So his story is so important. And this is to all those businesses that might be out there on this call and you're having your challenges with your workforce. Really think about recruiting talent from community providers. You have a pool of candidates who are eager to work, very skilled, trained in very specific areas sometimes, or interested in working in different areas. And when you work with a provider like CORE foundations at Kennedy Krieger Institute, you get experienced staff. We train your workforce, we help you develop a job. There are lots of needs in organizations. We can help you. It's a win-win hiring situation. It has to be good for the business but we're matching that skill and talent. We also support with communication. We need to build a trusting relationship. So I am going to stop there so we have some time for questions, and I will be able -- we'll be sharing some of these slides that I know Philip will be able to share out. We want to thank you. We had a lot of content to cover and we hope that we can meet many of you again and keep talking about the work we're doing and hope to make a more impactful change nationally.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: I was gonna say Stacey, Rebecca and Tina, thank you so much for everything you've covered today. For those who are in our audience, you can ask a question either using the Q&A feature or more easily and directly, you can use the chat box to ask a question. And the chat box is, you know, one of the -- your chance right now to get connected. If you haven't -- if you were kind of overwhelmed by just how much good material was in this presentation, I'll just say that we'll be posting a recording of this webinar on RespectAbility's website so you can go back and re-watch this at your pace and your leisure. But -- I will take the moderator's privilege of asking the first question. And my first question is, you know, what do you see as your program's priorities for 2022? How are you going to continue your hybrid work? Are you going to keep virtual services as an option? But what does the future look like for the great work that you're doing at Kennedy Krieger?

>> Stacey Herman: Thanks, great question. Well because of our -- Neurodiverse at Work program is so broad in the scope of what we are doing, I will narrow it down. Our priorities are, of course, serving those currently in our services and supporting transitioning youth who have come out of school over the last two years and coming out of school, and ensuring we find a way to kind of expand on our workforce and meet those needs. You want to expand DORS services or your Voc rehabilitation services in your state, those are huge for services for those who might not be in their long-term support. So meeting more people's needs. We want to expand and continue to grow our own hiring efforts at the Institute, increasing our employment of individuals with disabilities. And training and education. We want to spread the word, we want to help people be more inclusive, whether they're a business - so they want to hire and retain individuals with disabilities as part of their workforce - or we want to work with providers as they're transforming their services from day habilitation models to community-based services. So we -- our training is broad and we want to be able to have --expand our reach. And we also are going to continue planning our next national conference for Neurodiversity in the Workplace. Our next one has been on hold due to the pandemic, so that is a big priority this year to get it on the calendar, and get many of you presenting at our conference.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Well I will make sure that we get -- when, you know, god willing and the creek don't rise, that we are able to actually have, you know, virtual or in-person conferences, we'll definitely share that with our audience. So again, you know, audience members, if you want to ask a question directly to our wonderful panelists, please do so in the chat box. Otherwise I'm just gonna keep asking questions. And so my next question is actually for Tina. So you know, I know we had a really broad audience today but we had -- a good number of HR professionals from a lot of different industries represented. So I’d say -- for those folks -- they've listened to this presentation today, they're really on fire, they want to get started working on neurodiversity issues. Tina, my question for you would be -- as an HR professional to other HR professionals, like, what are some of the first most important steps towards turning this knowledge into action? -- What should they look at and where should they go for more information?

>> Tina Schmitt: Yeah, sure. So I think one important step could be to think about this as an equity, diversity and inclusion strategy for your organization. So what we've done is actually wrap it into our strategic efforts for equity diversity and inclusion, because it absolutely should be there, and we all know how important EDI is to our organizations. So that's a really good place to start. And then secondly is gaining traction within your own HR team, I think, is critical, because you can't do this alone. You need other HR professionals. You need senior leaders in your organization, and really, it's so important just to start the conversation and to start creating awareness, because the moment you start to talk about it, that starts the awareness buzz, and then people will start to follow. So I think between those two things are really good places to start in your organization.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Perfect. And then next I wanted to ask Rebecca, you know, I'm really curious -- obviously you touch on the importance of -- kind of touching on -- getting family involved, and getting youth -- prepared to succeed. So I'm really curious, what would be your message to -- parents who are just at that point of beginning to think about transition services and transition supports for their youth? What would you tell them in terms of the resources that are out there or where they should go to get more information about helping their -- taking a step back and helping their youth step out into the competitive workforce?

>> Rebecca Colangelo: Yeah so I think my two pieces of advice: number one would be to, you know, reach out to a transition counselor in your middle school or high school. They're there and they're gonna have some resources that they can immediately provide to you to start exploring. But my second piece of advice is [unintelligible] say that -- parents and family networks, it is something that they have to take on their own to see what is out there in their own communities, because transition coordinators only have so many resources. You know, they may be able to connect you with a couple of agencies, point you in the right direction of some therapies or things of that nature, but I think the individuals that we see make the smoothest transitions have had support networks that are, you know, going to the local pizza place, seeing if there's a job folding boxes in the back that they can do, you know, on Friday nights or things of that nature. And you know -- I said -- we said be creative and have fun, and really that -- I think goes a long way. And particularly thinking about meeting an individual's personal needs and personal interests, too. You know, if Johnny doesn't want to fold pizza boxes, you know, going to Dominos and asking to do that is a terrible idea. So I think, you know, one, get connected with who you know in your schooling systems. But then two, really just do your own homework and ask, you know, your son, daughter, friend who needs to be served what do they want to do, you know? And that's gonna help guide a lot of those questions.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Absolutely, and -- that's why -- I think the idea of -- job shadowing and doing internships is so important is you gotta, like, really practically figure out what you do or don't want to do, or what you're good or what you're not good at. So we have a great question from Kate Wallace. And -- we have a quick great question from Kate Wallace about is there any kind of listing of businesses that specifically hire people with disabilities?

>> Stacey Herman: Yeah, so I haven't seen, like, a list that's a national list out there, but there are many businesses that do promote that they are inclusive employers. So there's the autism roundtable, when you think about Microsoft, JP Morgan, SAP, organizations, but I can think more locally as well that there are -- yes Philip, thank you, that's also a great resource as well. But when you think about the small organizations that are out there, those are in your home towns, those are in your cities next door to you, there are so many inclusive employers that I think we need to have a better network and ways to know who's being inclusive within our own community. And that is key. You can look for employers through Ability Jobs and other websites and people send listings out, but you're not necessarily capturing those local homegrown small organizations that we really -- that are really inclusive. [Crosstalk]

>> Tina Schmitt: Disability:IN is another network. But again, as Stacey mentioned, that's typically caters towards larger organizations. But Disability:IN is another really good network of employers.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Absolutely, great. And I was just going to mention that with Disability:IN. Disability:IN is a national network, they've got local chapters, they do an annual metric rating of big corporate -- big corporations that do a lot of diversity and a lot of hiring work, and they could be a really good resource to start with. But that's, again, that really high level, you know, big huge corporate employers which, a big chunk of the economy, but it's not a lot of smaller businesses that might be, you know, might not think about disability but could probably have a little greater flexibility with, you know, accommodations or input, so definitely check them out. I would say -- so I know we got a link in the chat earlier, but I definitely want to plug it again. So how can our audience give all of you feedback on this wonderful presentation and sign up to learn more about your work?

>> Stacey Herman: I put my email in the chat so you are welcome to email me if you want to talk more with us, if you want us to come do a training for you. We also really would like your feedback on our presentation, so you can click the link, it will take you to a survey. I see that Dr. Colangelo also put her email in the chat as well. You can also go to our website: kennedykrieger.org/neurodiversity, and you can see all of our programs there, And you'll have mine, Tina and Becca's email there as well. And we just want to thank everyone for this opportunity and we hope to connect with you. The way we're going to make change is. connecting and working together, so reach out.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: All right, perfect and I will just say quick closing out the chat box, two points. Something that's great is I see Ann Craig is responding to Kate Wallace's question about giving a shout out to centers for independent living which, you know, do a lot of work around inclusive employment training. That -- I'll pivot that to being a question. What are some of the CILs in Maryland and how can people find out more information about what a CIL does?

>> Stacey Herman: Yeah so there's CILs across Maryland in different regions. We mostly work with the CIL that's near us in the Baltimore area, in Towson Maryland, and you can reach out to me and I can connect you. But you can also go on their website for the center -- they have different names across the state as well, so I just want to point that out, that your centers for independent living also have different names, and that I can connect you or you can look it up and you can reach out. And they have classes, they focus on a lot of independent strategies whether it's in the home for independence or out in the community. And they also focus on employment.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Marvelous. So one final final final comment coming from one of my policy team, Shireen. She asked, you know, what is the biggest challenge that you're facing? I would say what is the biggest challenge that you're most excited about in the year ahead, and we'll close out with that.

>> Stacey Herman: Oh that's -- that's a great question. So I would say as far as the biggest challenge, I think is that the direct support workforce has their recognition, acknowledgement that we are able to build in processes and systems that recognizes direct support professionals as -- it's a career and there's a career ladder, it's an opportunity for growth, because we need highly qualified and trained individuals to be able to provide that support so each person can have meaningful experiences and access their community. We all need to access our community in different ways, and sometimes that means having someone there to support us, but we have to make sure that we are treating our direct support professionals with respect, they're getting quality wages, and that they're getting the training that they need so that they can continue in this role and we can retain direct support professionals to continue to provide the amazing service that they do.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Which would be a shameless plug for why you should get involved with state chapters of APSE, or keep track of national issues through organizations like RespectAbility because -- Congress, for example, is considering some major investments but they're not doing anything right now. But we -- you need constituents to call out the need and the importance of the direct care workforce. And to close it out, Rebecca and Tina, what are the biggest challenges that you're most excited about in the year ahead?

>> Tina Schmitt: Getting back into the workplace.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Oh absolutely, because it's going to be virtual, there's going to be hybrid, there's going to be transportation issues. If you're in the DC area, the metro isn't working anymore but, you know, there's still traffic, so you're absolutely right, getting back to work, both metaphorically, physically, figuratively, literally, via Zoom, not Zoom --

>> Tina Schmitt: In every single way, the return to work for our entire workforce feels different to each and every employee, whether you have a disability or not, so I think as an overarching challenge for HR and for our organization, you know, the return to work is really our top priority.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Wonderful. All right Rebecca, you get the last word.

>> Rebecca Colangelo: Oh man, hot seat here. I think, you know, kind of the biggest challenge that I foresee, or that I would like to get over is the inconsistency one. You know what -- are we gonna be in person? Are we gonna be virtual? You know, and how long is this gonna have to keep going on, because I think currently that is what is impacting our community members the greatest is that uncertainty, which is -- I mean, it's impacting all of us, but you know, to be able to provide some more of those, you know, guarantees that we're always going to be meeting at, you know, x y z park on on Mondays and we don't have to wear masks and we don't have to flip flop between virtual and hybrid, if we don't want to. You know, if we want to, that's a different story. So yeah I would just like to, you know, kind of wait -- continue to wait this out to get through those consistency challenges because I think that'll improve the lives of everyone.

>> Philip Kahn-Pauli: Well I would say that clear processes, collaboration, team building involvement of, you know, person-centered planning, those are all pieces that are skills that the people are in the trenches doing the great work like you all are going to be needed. I thank you each and every one of you. Stacey, Rebecca, Tina, thank you so much for being with us today. Audience members, thank you for joining us, glad you pitched it on the chat box. Thanks for introducing yourselves, thanks for asking some great questions. Make sure you go and fill out that participation survey, and take care, and make sure to sign up for the next webinars that are coming up in the next couple weeks. All right, take care everyone and have a great day.