**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Staying Connected: Engaging Youth Virtually**

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LAURA CASERTANO: OK. So again I want to welcome everyone to today's webinar. And I'm going to turn things over to your moderator today, Maisha Meminger. She's with the Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. Maisha, take it away.

MAISHA MEMINGER: Hi, Laura. How are you doing? And thank you so much for your help. My name is Maisha Meminger. I'm with the U.S. Department of Labor, Division of Youth Services, at the Employment and Training Administration. We're so excited to have you all here today.

Hope you can all hear me. I think – I just want to make sure. Can you guys give me a little – (inaudible) – in the chat that you can hear me, please? (Pause.) OK. People are typing.

I want to invite you guys all to join us today for this webinar on "Staying Connected: Engaging Youth Virtually." This is a very exciting topic right now. This topic came from you all who joined us on May 4th at our COVID-19 youth answering question session – Q&A session. We had over 1600 people join us on that session and it was an amazing exchange of information and a wealth of resources.

And folks asked to hear what's happening in our country around virtual engagement. And we wanted to make sure we responded back in kind by putting something together for you all today.

So again, it's going through the slides. And it's moving a little slowly, everybody, so please bear with us on the back end. So that's me, Maisha Meminger. Good to see you guys all again. I'm happy to see people from all over the country. We had over 2600 people registered and they're coming in and we're excited to have you all here.

Who we have today speaking to us are going to be several presenters with expertise in the area of engagement. Now, some of these presenters are just getting new – are getting acclimated to this new way of engaging young people and serving young people during this time.

Keda Dorisca is going to be joining us from Delaware speaking about the local workforce area and how they have worked together to engage young people virtually. We have Michael, or Mike, Garringer joining us from the amazing organization MENTOR, our leading experts in mentoring around the country. We appreciate his time today.

We also will have – we have Jacque Ivy from the great organization GetSchooled.com. She will be joined with Charles Hiteshew as well as Jason Rzepka. Thank you, Jason. Cross my fingers. They're going to be talking about a virtual job fair they hosted and the amazing engagement of young people, not just at a one-time session, but using technology to keep people engaged repeatedly after an event even happens, to make sure young people are still together and learning.

We also have from our awesome workforce area in Employ Prince George's County, Maryland. We thank Brian Walker for being here, Monica Chavis and Denise Higgs. And we will also have a youth presenter sharing – Marissa Edwin (ph), sharing her experiences as Prince George's County has gone into a virtual workspace experience. So we're excited to have them here with us today.

Just to share with you guys our objectives today is to share tips. We are all about sharing at the Division of Youth Services. We want to make sure that everybody is learning what's happening in the field, how you can use those ideas and take them back home, engage in partnership building and strengthening your services for young people. And again, we'll talk about virtual engagement, job fairs, job experiences, as well as mentoring today. And we hope this will spark some innovation in your area.

And we know that with what we're going through right now in a global pandemic, things are changing rapidly every day and we have to stay on our toes as we serve young people. But we want to make sure that we are moving with the times and learning from each other.

I just wanted to touch base one time on what we've done since the beginning of March when we first were hit with this very – we keep hearing the word unprecedented situation on our country. And we wanted to make sure that the U.S. Department of Labor of course met the challenge with making sure that we answered questions across various divisions.

We have May 4th webinar that you can watch on our youth.workforcegps.org site. The U.S. Department of Labor has gone forth and created a massive wealth of resources for adults, senior citizens, persons who (work in mines ?), everything from persons with disabilities. So we have folks from all over the country – excuse me, all over different issues that have been answering questions from the U.S. Department of Labor.

We have also answered your questions you asked us on that webinar from May 4th, to make sure that we respond to what you wanted to know about. And what we've had is we created a best practices or shared – lessons learned share document.

What that looks like is we took all the notes from that webinar May 4th. We created a four-page document that allows you all to see what everybody on that webinar shared as their best practices. Again, that was May, month two of where we were in at-home – stay-at-home orders. And folks from all over the country were using Zoom and Google Meet. And we put that all in a list for you all.

And also then talked about partnerships (with restaurants ?) engaging people. We'll talk about that in a second. Also we have – our colleagues at YouthBuild have a six-part webinar series that they produced and – (inaudible) – another one of our offices – organizations at the U.S. Department of Labor, that combined both young people learning in – (inaudible) – and on a worksite building homes.

And they have an amazing six-part series that I would encourage you all to check out. They talk about virtual case management, learning, virtual opportunities. And that's an amazing link there for you all to be there.

Thirdly, we've created two pages of virtual engagement resources. These (are ?) primarily federal resources, anywhere from case management all the way to how to find food for young people, which many of you guys already have as resources. Mental health services, supportive services as such. But we wanted to put this all in one place for you all to be able to click and link to those resources. And there were so many resources that we had, not only did we have one page but we ended up having to make two pages.

So check those links out when you have a chance. They're on our main page at the youth.workforcegps.org.

So with that being said, I just wanted to share a couple highlights of what we learned on May 4th and what we've been learning from the field. We're learning that communication is key; we'll talk about that today. Making sure that it's not a one-time piece of – connection to our young people, that young people are being communicated with repeatedly. Even when they don't ask for information we want to make sure that they are getting information on supportive services, on food resources, where to find internet access.

We want to make sure that young people know if their library or their schools are allowing them to "check out" technology such as iPads and Chromebooks. We want to make sure that our young people know who's having free internet access. We learned a lot about the fact that internet access is very, very – very, very hard to get for some of our young people.

And we're learning that it takes a lot of partnerships. Some libraries kept their internet access on. We have a lot of parking lot parties. We're of course socially distanced, where young people are doing homework in their cars. And so we want to make sure that we are getting that information to young people.

Supportive services, food – we want to make sure our young people know about food. Access to diapers for young women and young men who may be parents. And so we want to make sure that we know about that. And just any kind of information we can share through text, phone calls, emails, our Facebook pages, our Instagram pages, keeping our young people abreast of those opportunities has been an amazing shout-out to industry and to our – what we do serving young people.

So let's get to the meat of today's conversation and hopefully you'll all hear everybody. Our first presenter we have is Keda Dorisca. And she is coming to us from Georgetown, Delaware, from the Pathways to Success program. She is a Seaford High School coordinator and she's going to share with us what local areas are doing around – her local area, excuse me, is doing around going from face-to-face services to a virtual or hybrid of services for our young people. So Keda, can you hear me?

KEDA DORISCA: Yes, Maisha. I can hear you.

MS. MEMINGER: Fabulous. I'm going to pass it off to you. And I think Laura is going to progress your slides for you.

MS. DORISCA: Yes. Good afternoon, everyone. I hope you all are having a great day today. Before we get started, I wanted to engage you all in a couple of poll questions.

The first poll question that's going to come up is, "What is your favorite way to communicate?" And the next one is going to be, "Which social media platform do you use the most?" (Pause.)

MS. MEMINGER: OK. I think as that comes up – Laura, let us know when those are available. As those come up – thank you for those questions, Keda. If folks want to chat in as well, that'd be great, while we wait for those polls to come up. And those will come up shortly.

So Keda, why don't you get started with some of you information about Pathways to Success and then we'll see if we can get those polls up shortly, OK?

MS. DORISCA: Awesome. So as I said – or as Maisha has told you guys, my name is Keda Dorisca. I am the Pathways to Success high school – Seaford High School coordinator. We are in an in-school youth nonprofit based out of Sussex County, Delaware. Our county is very rural. So as you can think of rural – as you think of rural, of course everyone needs a car to get around. And as you drive down the state, there's land everywhere and a lot of corn fields. So it's very, very land-dense and rural.

So we're currently in four high schools. We're in Cape Henlopen High School, which is located in the eastern part of the county. We're in Sussex Technical High School, which is located in the center of the county and encompasses students from the entire count. Milford High School, which is located in the northeast part of the county. And Seaford High School, which is in the western part of the county.

And as you can imagine, the climate and culture of our schools are all different. But what connects us all is the Pathways program.

Laura, did you – can you move on to the next slide?

MS. MEMINGER: I think we're having some technical difficulties right now, Keda. Colleagues on the call, I'm going to ask you all to please, at your earliest convenience, go to that area where it says "file share" and print out – and pull up a copy of today's PowerPoint for your perusement (sic). We are having some technical difficulties on our end and we're not advancing the slides at a rapid rate. I don't know if it's because we have so many people online; I have no idea.

So Keda, I'm going to actually have you continue to speak as Laura will try to address this issue. And I'm going to let our colleagues on the phone – on the line know that we are on slide – I think 16, everybody. So I think we're trying to get that addressed now.

So Keda just – oh, here we go. (Inaudible.) Yay! So go back to the poll, Keda.

MS. CASERTANO: Maisha, I think your Adobe is a little bit slow because the poll was up before. It's not up right now.

MS. MEMINGER: OK. So I'm going to be quiet now, everybody. It's my computer. I'm going to log out and come back in. So go ahead, Keda. Go ahead and I'll see what's going on my end. My internet's – (inaudible) – OK?

MS. DORISCA: Yes. I think it's mine too because I can't see the poll either. But it's all good. We're going to move forward.

And as we're learning and we're going through this technology boost, technology is not flawless. It does have its flaws and the party must go on.

So as I was saying before, the climate of each – the climate and culture of each school is different, but our schools are bonded by the Pathways program. We are with our students for five years, four years in high school and then a year after into their life plan or career decision.

And their career decision can be either a four-year program or a two-year college program; or trade school, military, or full-time employment. We know that at the end of their four years with us in high school we want them to have mapped out exactly what they want to do. Of course, there's flexibility to change that, but we must have a plan. It's important.

My next slide I – just so you all know, I'm on the slide that says "Pathways to Success Mission." So the Pathways to Success mission is to prepare youth, adults, and their families for successful lives. We utilize innovative and creative approaches in mentoring and education to help individuals develop to be healthy, productive, contributing, and responsible citizens. Working in service to the at-risk communities in a spirit of offering hope through education and information, and creating positive systemic change through empowerment.

The next slide, as you'll see, is our goals, what we offer, and our model and our success. Our goals are to provide tools for academic success; enable individuals to experience a wide range of opportunities; encourage and support individuals while they consider their future; build competence, confidence, and community; and engage and the support of our parents as partners. As you know, it's important not only to have the student, but also have the parent. It's a twofold effect.

We offer academic support, character education, preparatory experiences, connecting activities, family involvement, career planning, college preparedness, business outreach and – business partnership and outreach, and work-based activities.

Our success rate is that we have a 98 percent graduating on time; and we have a 96 percent of our students going to college, the military, or full-time employment.

Our model that helps us get to our goals, what we offer, and our successes, is what we have created and follow is called CARE – consistent, authentic, respectful empowerment. We know that when people have those entities, they're more likely to propel themselves and their families further. And the relationship building between the coordinator or the person who is working with a client is better if it's a holistic approach.

All right. We're going to our next slide and it says, "Staying Connected Today." And you guys can go ahead and flip to the next slide. It's called, "Reaching Students: Pandemic and The Resurgence of Racial Injustice in the Mainstream Consciousness."

We know that our students are not – our students and clients that we serve are not only affected by this pandemic but also the injustices that are happening in the world. And it's a twofold approach to make sure that we understand that they have issues going on and they have their own thoughts and process through all of this also.

Before the pandemic, our program of course – we had daily interactions because we are in the schools.

(Audio break.)

OK. Of course, we've had – as I said before, we're in the school, so we have daily interactions with our students all the time. There's opportunities to interact before, during, and after school, and weekends of course in emergencies and contact any moment there's an emergency.

Of course we had the one-on-one mentoring, the academic support, reaching out to counselors, teachers, students, making sure that that relationship is developed. Of course the personal growth and the mental health, because our schools do hold a lot of the support and services that our students need. And of course working through our CARE model and making sure that we do that to the best of our ability.

During this pandemic has caused us to adjust, to look at what we've done before and how do we shape it to what is going on now to reach our students? So of course we had to adjust and be more creative.

We had an advocate for our students to be met where they are in terms of technology or resources that they need, that maybe they couldn't come into town limits to get the resources, but maybe we can go out to the students to give them the materials that they need.

More intentional contact, that's like food, tech, making sure weekly and daily that our students had the things that they need to survive, because students are surviving.

Broader accessibility also with us and our students, making sure that they know that they can call us at any point in time and we will connect with them.

Academic support, making sure that we – in our relationship with our admin, our teachers, and our counselors – are strong so that therefore it will be strong with the student also to get information that the student needs.

And understanding that lack of equity has always existed and lack of resources has always existed. It's just been exacerbated through what we're going through right now.

And of course, reaching our students to help them get to the personal growth and the mental health supports that they need. Just passing it to that resilience inside of them in order to persevere through the climate we have right now.

The next slide you can go on to is called, "Approaches: What We Do." So throughout our program our students have always been able to contact us through text and calls, because it's imperative that we are able to stay in touch with our students all the time. And our parents are able to stay in touch with us and our students are able to stay in touch with us. So it's a two-way street.

And our response rate has been in the 95 percentile. Of course, there's that 5 percent of students who we can't contact based on either the phone bill isn't paid or they're working all the time, which students have been doing because they've been home. And during the pandemic, if they're family's struggling, of course the first thing that comes to mind when you're trying to survive in this time is trying to get a job.

So that has been sort of the hindrance a little bit of reaching some students. But at the end of the day, we've been able to contact 95 percent of our students and making sure that we keep in contact with them. If we're not able to meet with them – if we're not able to hear from them on Monday, we'll hear from them on Wednesday or Friday, or even Saturday or Sunday. Making sure that we go the extra mile for that student to know that we care and that we are there for support for them and their family.

The next mode of communication that we've been doing is social media. Whether that is putting things out in bite-sized pieces so students can get the information that they need, whether that be COVID testing or going out to vote and understand what their voting (bases ?) are; or just, hey, there's food being given out at certain places and times.

Or if a student doesn't have minutes on their phone, a great way to engage them is through social media because of Instagram and the chat preferences it gives you. And Twitter and Facebook and the Messenger and Snap Chat, because they have all these tools on the back end that can help you communicate and engage with your students. We've had an engagement rate of 75 percent as of right now.

The next piece that we have been working on is trying to reach students through town halls. We've been trying to use the platform that has been circulating, such as Zoom or (Hooper ?) or Messenger or Teams to reach students as much as possible and in a group fashion, so that they can also – we can build that community during this pandemic and injustices and this moment in this climate.

Because it's important to bring kids together. The isolation of being at home where school was an escape is still present. And if we can help our students have a space of break between those two, we try to do our best.

So earlier on we did a COVID town hall, which was educating students about COVID-19 and how it impacts youth, how it impacts the family, and how it impacts the world. So we had people who were working on – experts who were working on COVID and had them come in to talk about that. And we also had mental health – some mental health professionals also, and an educator to come in and talk about how COVID is impacting education also.

Most recently we had a movie screening for the Bryan Stevenson movie, "Just Mercy," with students just to talk about what is going on in the world.

You all can move on to the next slide, which is called, "Challenges." First and foremost, like right now and like today, technology and this new normal that we're in is not perfect. Technology is not perfect within itself. So it has been challenging to reach students. We're not going to say it's easy because it hasn't been. But it has been a new way and a new avenue to reach students that maybe we haven't been able to reach before.

So we have this new normal, which is a challenge, this virtual world, making sure that students are engaged. Students adapting to this virtual world and learning – and trying to learn online, but more importantly, trying to teach themselves. Access to technology has been a challenge because, like I said before, we're in Sussex County. It's rural. And broadband internet and Wi-Fi has been an issue.

And the next challenge is Maslow's hierarchy of needs, is a need a stable place to live, food, light, just the basic of basics. And a lot of the support students get is in school. So when they're missing some of those basics, it's going to be challenging. And students are operating in a state of survival, so that has been challenging also.

Understanding grace all around. Not only grace for ourselves as people who are trying to use new avenues to reach students, but also grace – helping students understand that they must also have grace with themselves. Because it's not – this isn't easy. This is a day-by-day process until we master it, which nothing is ever mastered in life. But understanding that – helping them understand that, hey, it's OK if today you can only do two things. But tomorrow, let's reach for three. So grace has been important – has been a challenge.

The next – I spoke about it before, internet and Wi-Fi and broadband here, especially in Sussex County. But I don't want to just limit it to Sussex County; this is happening all over the country and all over – all over the country.

Student motivation and student consistency. It's not like you have to sit in a classroom or coming to you at certain places and times where they must be there. It's all them a little bit on their own, and that motivation and consistency that they have to build within themselves. So it's not going to be easy, like I said earlier. But it's one day at a time, pushing – and dragging sometimes – to get the work that needs to be done, done.

You all can move on to the next slide, which is going to be "Successes." A lot of our success is rooted in our golden egg, which is the relationship we've built with our students. The relationship that we've built with our students has been the foundation of everything that we do. The respect and the accountability and the guidance, but also the partnership, has been the guiding force for everything that we've been able to do.

So we've had – we've graduated 80 students this past – in this last month, in June, from all four schools. Forty-seven of those students fell under the Department of Labor grant that we have. We've helped underclassmen advance to the next grade level.

We have improved in our advocacy, but most importantly or students have improved in advocating for themselves. Encouraging students to complete work has been like they just know like clockwork that we are going to be contacting them, that we are going to be asking for them to get work done. If they don't understand, we will be that liaison with their teachers, admins, their counselors, to help them get where they need to be.

Also, student buy-in day-by-day into this virtual world has been a really good success for us, getting our students online and into Zoom, even though challenging, but it's been successful. We deem it as successful.

Trying different approaches has been really successful also. Like, if I can't reach you by text, I'm going to reach you on Instagram. If I can't reach you on Instagram, I'm going to try and see if I can reach your mom on Facebook. If we can't reach that way, I'll make sure that – maybe I'll get a message to a friend. Or maybe I'll post something on Instagram and you'll just see the flier and check in.

MS. MEMINGER: So let me ask – so Keda, can I jump here to ask you, what do you think your number one success was with engaging people online?

MS. DORISCA: The number one success has been posting – we post daily quotes every day. (Inaudible) – the students who will see it and reply back or have a comment.

MS. MEMINGER: OK. So Keda, I want to ask you to look at your next slide about rules of engagement. Can you jump to that real quick?

MS. DORISCA: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. MEMINGER: OK. So yes, the rules of engagement. Like, these are some great rules. I was looking over your slides earlier today and I think that – what was the number one rule? Like, what was your number one rule of engagement for your young people?

MS. DORISCA: I think it was a mix. It was a mix of – I think it all falls under "norms," right? The explaining to students why we're doing this and why we have to do things this certain way, but also understanding that conduct and contact has changed and this is the new way that we're going to be contacting you and keeping in touch.

MS. MEMINGER: Exactly. And I think flexibility too, right? Flexibility with some people as well? They had to – (inaudible).

MS. DORISCA: Yes, yes. Because we might not be able to reach – because school has been out since March, so you might not be able to reach a student at 9:00 a.m. You're probably going to –

MS. MEMINGER: Exactly.

MS. DORISCA: And you're probably not going to reach their parent at 6:00; you're probably going to reach a parent at 10:00 p.m.

MS. MEMINGER: Yeah. Yeah.

(Cross talk.)

So I want to also jump to your next slide that talks about tips for engagement or resources. When you talk about virtual ideas – and that's the next slide, Laura, when you get a chance – when you talk about virtual ideas, what – I see you already talked about, like, you had a COVID session with young people, talking about mental health. You talked about some ways of engagement, talking about having a movie-watching party, which sounds very exciting.

What would you say – (inaudible) – on your list. Can you share a little bit about what you mean by fieldtrips?

MS. DORISCA: Fieldtrips. So it's a new thing that we're trying to figure out is how do you have virtual fieldtrips? We have – we're looking into doing it for colleges. Colleges have virtual tours online, so why don't we use virtual tours to take the students through the school? And if they have questions, then they post it in a discussion board.

Like, I went to the MLK Building; what's on the third floor? Is it SGA or is it – what is on the second and third and first floor? And going to a certain building and asking what is happening in that building. And engaging with those colleges into – in terms of what do they have to offer our students or to impact our students to attend their university?

MS. MEMINGER: Yeah. And I know there's a couple – we shared some of those resources on our website regarding virtual campus tours. But also I think we also want to look at the fact that maybe employers can do virtual fieldtrips, right? To do a job shadowing day with our young people and also walk them through what their job looks like when we talk about virtual engagement with – and partnering with employers. So we've got to get creative in this space.

So Keda, you have a couple questions. And I just want to wrap up so we can get to our mentor colleagues. That would mean moving the slides, Laura.

So can you tell me the number one thing you learned in this space? And for the colleagues who sent in questions to Keda, we're going to try to get back to you guys on the wrap-up. We have your questions in queue and we'll try to – and if not, we'll send your questions to Keda in an email and she can get back in touch with you – each of you writing your questions.

Keda, what was the number one lesson learned that you believe – on your lessons learned slide – worked for you during this time?

MS. DORISCA: I would have to choose – (pause) – I would have to choose connection and consistency –

MS. MEMINGER: OK.

MS. DORISCA: – is what we learned the most. We are just building that connection in a virtual space with our students, but also being consistent. Even though there is COVID and we're doing this six feet apart, we still show up to our kids' homes. We still show up to where they may be. And yes, we are doing six feet apart, but we're showing up for them because some people aren't and we need to make sure that our students have the resources and the tools that they have in order to succeed during this time.

MS. MEMINGER: Exactly. And we talked about that earlier. Like, communication, communication, communication. Continuous. Not just one-point communication. Maybe weekly communication, being able to be accessible for our young people. And I think that you shared those tools with us.

And I just wanted to go to the next slide and share Keda's contact information is right there. And of course, you guys have a copy of this slide. Keda, thank you so much for really being open and sharing that transition for Georgetown, Delaware and for the Pathways program, and connecting young people and keeping them engaged.

And we will get to your questions, I promise, colleagues. But we have to go to our colleague mentor, Michael. Thank you so much, Keda. I appreciate you. Michael Garringer, how are you?

MICHAEL GARRINGER: Doing great. Thanks for having me.

MS. MEMINGER: Fabulous. Thank you for being here. I am excited to have you here talking about virtual mentoring and (the lead ?). So you're going to take over your slides. Hopefully they're working for you. And show us what MENTOR, one of our leading experts in mentoring, is learning from the field and what are some great ideas that you guys have? Thank you so much.

MR. GARRINGER: Sure. Yeah. No, thanks, everyone. And happy to be with you today.

For anyone who isn't familiar with the work of MENTOR, we are not a direct service provider in terms of providing mentoring relationships, but we are intermediary organization that does a lot of work around advocacy, public awareness, and a lot of training and technical assistance and research. And that's obviously where my background lays.

I want to just quickly set the stage, although our last presenter covered a lot of this. As you can likely imagine, the last four or five months have not been easy for mentoring programs. A lot of matches, a lot of relationships have had trouble connecting with programs shut down.

I think it's also important to remember that natural mentoring relationships have also been disrupted. For your young people, they may have natural mentors at their jobsites or in their classrooms that they're also not seeing because those institutions have been shut down. And as our last presenter noted, I think the needs of young people have also shifted quite a bit during this time. So we'll talk a little bit about how that's played out in the mentoring space.

We did some survey work with a research partner of ours called Pacific Market Research, where we surveyed a large swath of American adults and asked them a number of questions, among them questions about whether they're mentoring a young person.

And you can see on the slide here we asked, how has COVID impacted your relationships? For a pretty good percentage of them it's actually had a positive impact. I think that's because mentors have stepped up and helped in ways that maybe they hadn't before, being a little bit more proactive about providing – (audio break). But as you can see, a pretty large percentage have had either a mixed impact or no impact, but a quarter of them said it's had a really negative impact.

I think you'll see a little bit more of that on this slide. We asked, how are you keeping in touch with your young person or young people that you're mentoring? As you might expect, Zoom, Facetime, video conferencing options were kind of the best ones. But a lot of phone calls, right? There's still, in this fancy day and age, there's nothing wrong with a good old fashioned phone call every now and then. A little bit of in-person mentoring with some social distancing.

But where I start to get concerned is you see one in five adults said, I haven't been in contact with my mentee at all. So there's a young person that's probably not getting what they need from a supportive adult. I'm even more concerned about the 10 percent that were meeting but not doing any social distancing while they do it. So we may want to talk to those folks a little bit about safety.

So you can see a little bit how mentoring relationships broadly have been responding. And I should note that this research also includes natural mentors that are not necessarily in a program in doing their mentoring.

So we also did a separate survey of the nation's mentoring programs. And this runs the gamut from people working with elementary-age kids all the way up through kind of young adults in the workforce space, as you all are. But you'll see that those programs estimated that less than 60 percent of their matches are still in touch regularly.

As the previous presenter noted, lots of issues around access. The digital divide is still real in this day and age, unfortunately. And programs are finding themselves doing things like finding hot spots or free Wi-Fi around the city. They'll sit in a restaurant parking lot that's still got theirs turned on and maybe we can chat from there.

Some creative solutions – I mean, some of these are for younger kids than I think you all are serving. But I was surprised to see a lot of emphasis on matches spending time doing online classes together. And I think the workforce participants – now is a great time to be doing virtual trainings, diving into online learning opportunities that might strengthen their career prospects and career knowledge.

So what did workforce programs and mentors within them do, given the current reality that we're in with COVID? I think I'll start by talking about what programs can do. I think it's important for programs to understand that transitioning to some elaborate online e-mentoring platform may not be the best solution. And I think our previous speaker spoke to this.

You can get by for the time-being, I think, with phone calls, emails, texts, video chats. A lot of that technology sits in our pockets in our phones every day, right? So certainly an easier access point than a fancy platform.

I think one of the other barriers, though, is that often times programs have rules around, say, (auto-program timed contact ?) or how you can contact that young person. And I've actually encouraged programs to maybe think about are there ways that they can relax some of those rules during this time of isolation.

Obviously, you don't want to compromise safety in any way, and your insurance provider or legal counsel might have something to say about changes you're considering. But I think now is a time where we cannot leave people isolated just because we're all facing this pandemic together, right? I mean, the word "together" has a lot of pull there.

Mentors I think really can help, and programs can encourage them and maybe even offer additional training on, how do I talk to young people about their emotions, right? How do I help them process? They may have lost a loved one to COVID, right? And so I may have started out as a career-focused mentor to you, but now I'm helping you process the grief of losing a loved one or a family member, right? And so not all mentors were ready to do that kind of work with a young person.

I also think emphasizing kind of instrumental problem solving. What's your issue right now? What can I help you with? Can I run to the grocery store? Can I help you figure out a banking issue? Whatever it may be. Real kind of practical problem solving I think is the right way to go.

I would also say for matches that were going to end, you may want to just end them as you would. I know there's an instinct to keep them going, but I'd only do that if you could do that kind of safely. Obviously, if you're carrying more matches to monitor and check in with, that becomes a staff capacity issue at some point.

For existing mentoring relationships – and I know this is where it's a little bit easier – once again, I think increasing the meeting frequency and the flexibility of when those meetings happen I think is important. Reach out to that young person when they need it, not when it's scheduled according to some schedule that you may have had before all this hit.

As I mentioned earlier, I think emphasizing book learning and online learning opportunities, but also discussing transitions either back into work environments if a state or a county is opening up and letting employees come back into a workspace. They may have questions around that.

They may also be questioning a career plan that they are in the middle of pursuing and they realize, wow, I was going to be a massage therapist and it's going to be years before we can touch people in a room again, so I have to transition to some other career thing. And I think mentors can be instrumental in helping that.

I think if you have new mentoring relationships that are just trying to get to know each other right now under these circumstances, I would try and do that via video as much as possible. You can pick up on nonverbal cues; you can kind of get a sense of how the person's doing.

If you're stuck in some situation, though, where it's text only, there are some things that research suggests are helpful. Really using kind of self-disclosure, talking about yourself a little bit, being authentic, not asking closed questions that can be answered with a yes and no, and really trying to just get that conversation going as much as possible via text.

And once again, I think frequency of communication is important. If you have a new young person that you're working with, don't text them once a week. Reach out every other day and just make sure that you're letting them know that you're there for them.

So the other issue that's come up is I know a lot of mentoring programs are thinking about, well, heck, how can we shift to virtual mentoring either the whole hog or in part for the long term? Because we don't know when we will be done with this situation. So maybe asking, is now a time to really build out our virtual mentoring capacity as an organization?

And I don't think that's a bad instinct, but there's a few things I would caution folks around. One is, really think about what your program's theory of change is. What is it that you're trying to do with mentoring to help young people or to produce some kind of difference for them in their lives? It may be that the mechanisms of change there really requires an in-person interaction, particularly if you're doing a group thing where the young people are benefiting as much from interactions with each other as they are from interactions with their mentor. That's going to be really tough to do virtually.

Even if you think that your program will work through virtual delivery methods, you also need to think about the staff support needed. Sometimes people think, oh, just doing e-mentoring will be a lighter lift because I don't have to do all this in-person stuff. And I would argue that in some ways it may actually be more of a time burden on staff and they may not feel comfortable doing it.

I think it's also important to ask, is this the mentoring experience that people want? I've been hearing stories anecdotally of mentoring programs where mentors have just said, look, I signed up to work with a young person. I liked going to the school or the jobsite where they were at. I don't really want to do Facetime with them; it's not kind of the experience that I wanted.

Same thing from young people. They often think of the online world as their space and they kind of don't like us old people using it to kind of do adult-related things in a space that they may have considered their own before all this.

So like I said earlier, I think simple solutions, simple technology, is kind of what's needed here. I really don't think folks should go down the path of building a proprietary platform unless there's a really specific need that drives that.

And certainly, like with all things, if you're going to try something new, evaluate it. Make sure you're asking folks how that's going and that it's the experience that they want.

And I think lastly, I'll just end with a mentor does make some resources available. We have an amazing page of resources on our website about how to keep connected with young people during this. We also have partnered with two e-mentoring platforms, icouldbe and Cricket Media, that offer online mentoring spaces. And they generously opened those up to other programs.

So if you really feel like, hey, I don't want to be setting up Zoom meetings – (inaudible) – on my own; I'd really like to use a platform of some kind, you can actually sign up to have your matches meet in these environments. And there's more information about that on our website.

And then lastly, there's a couple of resources that I want folks to be aware of. You can download these off of our website. Our core guidance for mentoring programs is a documented called "The Elements of Effective Practice." We recently came out with a workforce-focused version of that document that really speaks to practices that are good for workforce settings.

And then literally in February we came out with one on e-mentoring. And I wish I had waited a month because I would have put a bunch of COVID-related information into it. But it came out right before all this hit. But I still think the guidance in there, if you're going to virtual mentoring, is still solid.

So that's I believe all I have for today. There's my email on the screen.

MS. MEMINGER: Thank you so much, Mike. I just want to go back a slide to those resources and just see if you have any questions as people look. We have a couple more minutes for questions about e-mentoring or virtual mentoring.

So I had some questions that I wanted to pose to you, Mike, if you have the opportunity to answer these. What do you think the future of mentoring is going to be post-COVID? Do you think we're going to be more leaning on this kind of e-mentoring model or virtual mentoring model? Or do you think we're going to really keep striving?

Because actually, virtual mentoring has been around for years, correct? Folks in the rural communities have really been using this online platform because of distance. So how do you feel about the future of continuing mentoring on a virtual platform?

MR. GARRINGER: Well, I think – yes, and you're very correct that e-mentoring, virtual mentoring, whatever you want to call it, has been around for decades now. And I think given how prevalent cell phone technology is these days, I think it's going to increasingly be part of our lives. I mean, everything about those phones is increasing in the relevance in our lives.

But I would say that if you look at the e-mentoring literature on the types of programs that are successful in doing e-mentoring, they're often these things where mentoring is the only way to deliver that service. And your rural example is a good one. Or there are places where that's the best way to deliver mentoring to somebody.

And so we saw examples in the literature of, say, young people with chronic illnesses that are stuck in a hospital and can't see adults, right, connecting with others that may have the same illness that you have, about that experience. Immensely valuable, right? And that's really the only way or the best way to deliver that kind of mentoring.

I think what's an unanswered question is how much mentoring in a broad sense – kind of this whole-person development mentoring – how much of that can be done virtually? I mean, I don't doubt that, for anyone working with adolescents today, you're probably texting them or hanging out with them in some social media platform. I mean, even my own son is 14, won't – I have to text him and he's in the house with me. (Chuckles.)

I think – (inaudible) – that's happening a lot, but I think if your program is about deeper emotional support, really talking through things – or in the case of workforce, demonstrating skills or how to use a piece of equipment – I think some of that stuff has got to be done in person. And I think it's a very open question as to how we do that via technology if this pandemic is something that sticks around for years, right? That would be, I think, a tough question to answer in this moment.

MS. MEMINGER: I have one last question for you. I have a question regarding – somebody has asked, that they looked at your organization and they found out that you have a local listing in their area. How do they go about connecting to a local partnership organization on the ground level and try to get a mentor and linking up and serving WIOA youth in the local area?

MR. GARRINGER: Yeah. So I think there's a couple of things. One is we do have state-level affiliates in about 28 states now, and some of them actually serve multiple states that surround them. So if you go to our website and look for "mentor affiliates," I think is the name of the tab, you will see a list of where we have a state-level office. So those are folks that you can connect with.

If you're also just looking for mentoring programs in your area or want to find a mentor for a young person, we also have a tool called the mentoring connector. And that allows you to search a database of a couple thousand programs nationally. You can pull them up by zip code or other information and kind of learn a little bit more about what that program does. And chances are, you can probably find one in your local area that would be a good fit for a young person or people in your program.

MS. MEMINGER: Awesome, Mike. Thank you so much. And we look forward to working with you in the future about talking with workforce, how we can best partner on the local level between your mentoring programs that are part of your network and the WIOA local youth programs.

So I'm going to move forward and we're going to go next to our virtual job fairs with Jacque Ivy, Charles Hiteshew, and Jason – I'm not even going try. I'm trying but I'm not going to try because I'm going to try. Jason, are you there?

JASON RZEPKA: Yeah, all good.

MS. MEMINGER: I just want to – (inaudible) – that I've had a wonderful opportunity to talk to Jacque months ago and they were having this amazing job fair on May 7th. They're going to share with you what it was. And I signed up as a young person. And just the emails I received since that time and the text messages I received since that time have been so engaging. And I look forward to hearing from you guys, and you guys sharing what you guys have done as far as connecting young people to opportunities.

So I'm going to pass it off to Charles. And Charles, you have – you going to take over the slides now?

CHARLES HITESHEW: I will indeed. Thank you very much, Maisha.

MS. MEMINGER: Thanks so much, Charles.

MR. HITESHEW: Yep. Good afternoon, everyone. And I'm going to be one of a three-part series and we'll get it all done in the next 13 minutes. But I am Charles Hiteshew; I'm the executive director of 100,000 Opportunities Initiative, which was launched in 2015 by Howard Schultz, who has been the CEO of Starbucks Company.

And it was as a result, basically, of the increasing awareness that there were about 7 million open entry-level jobs in retail and hospitality, as they did the analytics. And they realized there was about 5 million what we call opportunity youth, young people between 16 and 24, neither working nor in school. So I think Howard kind of astutely realized this is a social engineering problem.

If we just open the access and give the right supports to these young people, we can certainly take care of a lot of open entry-level jobs that we have in a very tight labor market. And hopefully, if we give these young people the right support and the right pathways within our company, we can grow them, professionally develop them, and make them not only exceptionally loyal employees but exceptionally valuable employees to themselves and to our bottom line.

So they embarked on that effort five years ago and we've been responsible through our 55 member companies of helping to hire more than 200,000 what we call opportunity youth over the last five years.

Also in the course of that launch and that execution of that vision, we realized that we needed to reach out to opportunity youth and realize probably one of the most effective levers we could access was an organization called Get Schooled, which actually is a digital platform. It provides free and personalized support, as Maisha was just saying, as well as resources to help opportunity youth get their first job and hopefully get into college.

So through that partnership we came up with the idea – and Jason Rzepka will join us shortly; it was one of his original innovative ideas. And so we came up with this idea of a virtual job fair. And we've actually been doing it for three years now and kind of wanted to give you a sense of that. This was our first job fair back in 2018, in October. And we've been running them annually since then and we're finding the approach and the strategies.

And we thought that this would be a wonderful opportunity to give you an idea of how we put them together. And if anyone's interested afterwards going a little deeper with us, we're more than happy to do it.

So when we kind of envisioned doing this, we've obviously got to have a vision for what we want to do for youth. So National Youth Hiring day, it's designed to help as many young people as possible take their next step toward finding meaningful employment. It's not necessarily a guarantee of a job. But it is a guarantee that if you use the platform well, you're going to leave it better than you came onto it, in terms of preparation, knowledge, and possibly even access and placement in a job.

Secondly, we found – particularly in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic – that yes, of our 55 employers a large percentage of those in retail, hospitality, and restaurant businesses were furloughing and laying off in droves. And it was as dramatic as it's ever been since the Great Depression in 1929.

At the same time, as you all know, there's certain businesses that literally had to step up to respond to the urgency of the times. And we'll get to some of those companies in a minute. But we also realized that we also had to kind of bring in a third leg of the stool, and that was e-service providers on a national level. MENTOR was good enough to join us, as was Year Up and Get Schooled played a wonderful role as well.

And what they did on the youth hiring day was, for anyone that wasn't exactly focused on a job but needed other resources or supports, they were there to direct, support, or refer them appropriately. And probably what we realized was just as important for our fair was to raise awareness not only with our employers but also with the community at large – and the nation at large, in fact – that opportunity youth must be a critical part of the platform that we use to rebuild America as it tries to get on its feet in an equitable way after the pandemic and the associated economic fallout.

So here were our partners. And these were the ones that came up saying, we're hiring. Literally, we need to hire 50,000 people within the next six months. Or Amazon, 100,000 people; or CVS Health said 80,000 people.

So when we started taking surveys of who needed to hire quickly, it basically broke down to these kinds of organizations: the big box stores, which we know is handling much of the delivery that – and the shopping that retail – traditional retail used to do for us; health organizations; and obviously grocery stores were having to ramp up dramatically in response to folks that were having incredible need during this time. The Targets and the Walmarts are obviously those that were doing business like gangbusters.

And then we had participation of UPS as well. UPS, as you know, is having to deliver many of these goods from these big box stores as they are from – as is Amazon as well. So we realized that these folks en masse represented 150,000 open entry-level positions in the immediate term. So they had a huge hiring need and we felt we could give them a platform to get their word out bigger and broader than they would of their own volition.

And then we realized City Year was recruiting their 3,000 young people for their next cohort of service, as was Year Up was recruiting I think 2,000 people. So again, we brought MENTOR in to be a support and Get Schooled to be an online digital support for young people and did a phenomenal job.

So now I'm going to turn it over to my dear colleague, Jacque Ivy, who will talk to you about how we prepared and got the word out for the fair. So Jacque, I'll turn it over to you.

JACQUELINE IVY: All right. Thanks, Charles. So by the time we had all of our employers and our partners on board, we had six days to promote the job fair, which is a very short runway. And so one of our strategies was to do a targeted virtual media campaign specific to the zip codes that had the highest concentration of job openings.

So – (inaudible) – social media outlets, since we are an all-digital, youth-focused job and education website. We used our social media handles to really push out the event, but also encourage young people to sign up for our text line. So if they text the word "jobs" to 335577, they would be preregistered for the job fair.

And then our job and career coaches would then work with them all the way from the time that they joined through the job fair, saying, hey, do you need a résumé? Great. Use our template. Do you have questions to ask during the virtual hiring fair? You don't? No worries. Here is a list of the most common questions you should ask a hiring manager. So really making sure that we prepped young people for a rich experience the day of the job fair.

And so in the interest of time, I'm going to go ahead and kick it over to Jason, who's going to walk you through what the day of looks like in a virtual hiring fair setting. Jason?

MR. RZEPKA: Awesome. Thank you, Jacque. So here's a view into the lobby of the experience itself. We had three major design principles around the virtual hiring fair. It had to be intuitive, it had to be accessible, and it had to be additive.

And it had to be intuitive in that it had to be super easy to use and require next to no learning curve. It needed to be really accessible, so that means on any device, available to all, but that it should also accessible to young people. And that's a principle that shows up in a lot of decisions that you make in the course of shaping an event like this. And then additive. Every participate that took part in this event needed to leave better equipped to succeed than they entered. And so those key principles manifested in every facet of the experience.

And you're seeing here now the lobby where you walk in. And to those points, we presented a very clear fork in the road to say, if you're ready to go engage with employers and those that have paid opportunities, go to the left. If you don't feel like you're ready for that yet and you want to tap into job coaching or mentorship support, then go to the right and you can access those resources.

And another thing that's important to note is we made it as frictionless as possible to get into this experience. So there was no preregistration required. All you needed to do was enter your name, your email, and your zip code, and then you were on into the experience.

Now, when you make your choice here at the fork in the road, you find your way to the trade show floor. And what we've done here is we try and mimic the experience of a physical job fair as much as possible, so that it was as familiar as possible.

And some of the ways in which we've kind of made decisions here are clustering organizations so that there was a logic to why certain exhibitors were in certain places. Amazon is in the front because they had the most open positions. Fry's Food is in the back left corner because they're a regional chair based in Arizona and they had the fewest positions.

We've also kind of used the callouts around the mat to kind of emphasize certain employers only hire 18-plus, others will hire for 16 or 17-plus. And then with our job coaching support, we've put those mats in green. So just really try to make it as easy as possible for the participants to navigate this experience and be successful.

And this is a bit of a choose-your-own-adventure. You go and have a chance to check out the resources that are most relevant and interesting to you.

The next view here is of the actual digital booth that every exhibitor was able to create. And we wanted this to be a self-service way to engage, so that you can learn more about the organization. Like if it's an employer, what are the career paths, the benefits? What's a day in the life like working for that organization? What are the openings near you critically?

And that you can learn a lot about that and that the organizations can harness a lot of the materials they've already developed specifically in engaging young people. So they can upload videos that they've created specifically for young people around here are benefits that we offer to youth and so on and so forth. And then this is important so that everybody has a chance to get valuable information out of this and act on it.

I think the other critical thing here was you see the tab called "chat" up there. We also wanted to have a way in which you could engage with recruiters from each of these organizations. And so when you click "chat," you can enter into a chatroom experience that would be familiar and give you a chance to be in a dialogue with these organizations.

And one person who was in a lot of dialogues on National Youth Hiring Day was Jacque. And she's going to tell you a little bit about that.

MS. IVY: Thanks. So for anyone who goes to a job fair, one of the biggest benefits is to connect with employers. And that is what you can do during a virtual hiring fair.

So as Jason mentioned, you have a series of chatrooms. So every single employer has a chatroom and jobseekers can hop in and out as they see fit, to ask questions and seek additional information about job openings in their area.

And one of the great things I loved about our job fair is the fact that there are no bots here. So every virtual booth and every answer was responded to by a real working recruiter and human being. So these are not canned responses. So as young people engaged in the platform and they had questions, you are going to get a response from a real person. And I think that's such a nice value to have.

Now, we had company engagement in the job fair, but we also know that not every person had the opportunity to make that one-to-one or one-to-many connection. So we wanted to be super intentional about making sure that everybody had an action item, a next step, and resource to walk away with on the job fair.

So the instant we ended the job fair we updated the website and we gave everyone a list of actions that they could do. And we also send this information via email and via text as well. The first piece was to complete a post-even survey.

This is critical not only to say, hey, what did you like and dislike about the job fair itself? But this is key information for us to really get a sense of what are the most pressing needs for young jobseekers right now? So that is why we wanted to get that survey out as quickly as possible. And we incentivized the responses in order to get as many people to complete the form as possible.

We also listed on the youth side of the hiring day where they can get resources. So use your résumé template? Great. Did you land an interview and you want to do a mock interview? Fantastic. Here's some resources on that. But again, we really pushed all of our young people to sign up for the free text line. And that's where we have an opportunity to continuously engage young people after the job fair.

And so for those who didn't walk away with an immediate job offer, especially since we did not guarantee that, we made sure that all the young people had connections to Job Launch, which is a youth-friendly job search tool, so that young people can then continue their job search.

And I will hand it over to Jason to walk through some of the results of National Youth Hiring Day and to also share some of the lessons we've learned.

MR. RZEPKA: Excellent. Thanks, Jacque. So I'm not going to belabor this slide. You guys can download it. I think it's just a callout that we were really thrilled with the results. I mean, obviously there was a tremendous amount of need in the country at this time and we were fortunate to be in partnership with some of the few organizations that were hiring. Most organizations were not hiring.

And this set records for every job fair that we've done in our history, be it digital or physical, in terms of participation, in terms of engagement. And then even looking at the hiring day we had done a year prior, we increased engagement 10x this year versus the prior. We increased participation 3x. So we're starting to see the growth and development of this in a way that we really wanted to.

And I think critically, one of the numbers that I think is most important on this page is the SMS registrations. The way in which you could RSVP to join this event, though it wasn't required, was through the Job Launch line from Get Schooled. And that's 10,000 young people that signed up for this event but then also entered into one-on-one job coaching support. And as you heard from Maisha before, we're continuing to engage them. Jacque and her team are continuing to engage those youth and support them in their job search process.

In terms of engagement with the employers and the exhibitors, 26,000 booth visits in the course of five hours. That's pretty tremendous. The chat conversations, 8,561; those are instances where young people came to this fair looking for information and they're getting answers to their questions. They're being interviewed or having qualifying interviews and it's speeding as many of those young people as possible towards hires, which is our goal.

So the main thing I want to touch on here in closing – and apologies for rushing a little bit; we've got about 10 pounds of content in a 5 pound bag – and we are available to you all to go deeper on this subject apart from this. And we can spread out and have more time on it.

But a few things to just call out on the lessons learned because I think they're applicable to everybody that's looking at using virtual hiring fairs and these kinds of platforms.

The first two, go beyond hiring and emphasize the promises you can keep, I think are really about having a focus on what is your desired outcome? In this instance, I wanted to make sure that every young person and every employer who participated had a delightful experience. And so that informed some decisions we made to say, this event can't just be about hiring because we know that a lot of young people are not going to get hired and we know that a lot of employers are not going to fill all their open positions.

So we need to be delivering value in other ways. And some of those ways were to think about how can this help lift up the brand of participating employers through the way in which they receive press coverage through participating. How can we support young people with those additional supports, like what Get Schooled offers, like what MENTOR offers? So regardless if you get hired or not, you're going to leave this event stronger than you entered it.

On the data point, the great thing about these virtual job fairs is it gives you a richness of data and the experience of the jobseeker that employers are not accustomed to. And so we definitely saw a real appreciation for that.

We do see that tracking outcomes in terms of who got hired and then were they retained and for how long continue to be very vexing. And we don't have satisfying answers there, but I think this does open up new possibilities.

A couple other quick things to call out before we wrap up here is just time is your most precious resource on this. You may think it's money. But the more time you can give yourself, I think, for all parties considered, we're all figuring this out together. And the tech is going to fail and there are going to be barriers that you're not expecting, that you wouldn't see in a physical job fair.

So the more you can give extra time – I mean, in a perfect world I would say eight weeks – for yourselves, for employers, for the youth. Everybody's going to have a learning curve and we really handicapped ourselves by moving super quickly.

And then the last thing I'd say is just design for those who need it most. Always consider that attendee who has the greatest barriers for participation, and keep her and keep him in mind and have that inform every decision you make, because there'll be a lot of decisions to make along the way.

So those are some lessons. There's many more. But I think we'll need to wrap it up there.

MS. MEMINGER: Thank you so much, Charles and Jason and Jacque. I have a question. And I know I'm trying to get to the questions. I can't see the questions. But I have one question for you about the process. Was there a fee for the employer? That's a question that's come in a couple times.

And also – (inaudible) – my pre-context. U.S. Department of Labor cannot sponsor or give any endorsements for any platform. But folks are asking about the platform used and was there a fee for the employers?

MR. HITESHEW: So I'll take the employer part. Like Jason and Jacque said, we started way late on this so we didn't give ourselves a lot of running room on – leeway on it. But we did have sponsorship levels, $5,000; $3,000; and $1,000. And I think of the final nine employers, we got seven of them to give at the $1,000 level. So if we had had a little more time, I think we could have massaged that to get a few bigger donors at the $5,000 level. And I'm sure next time out we'll do that.

MR. RZEPKA: And the platform we used was vFairs – vFairs.com. And we've been really thrilled with them. They came highly recommended to us through a member of the 100,000 Opportunities Coalition that's been very – kind of at the vanguard on virtual hiring.

I know Brazen is another platform that folks often use. We really like vFairs because it's so open and enables the self-serve feature that is not available through Brazen. I'm sure there are many other great providers, but vFairs was our partner of choice.

MS. MEMINGER: Fabulous.

MR. HITESHEW: On cost, Maisha, just one other thing. I think anyone that's planning on doing this should find out what it is going to cost them and then create sponsorships accordingly. To be frank, when all was said and done in terms of our time, our vFair platform, and the time we spent with social media and the communications vendor, it cost us about $60,000 bucks to do. So create your sponsorships accordingly to cover at least part of the cost.

MS. MEMINGER: That's just at the partnerships, right? Like, if you have a small community, working with the next county; or maybe if it's a tristate area, working together in a collaboration to – you could split the costs or share some of the responsibilities. I think would also be a benefit for folks on the ground level who may not have $60,000 right now to spend on a virtual job fair. And we're always promoting partnerships at Labor.

So thank you, guys, so much for that. I just wanted to pause for a second and say that we are going to go over a little bit. We have so much information and – (inaudible) – webinar. This really could have been two webinars.

We really want to touch base on what experiences – and we're going to go to Prince George's County, Maryland to talk about what is going on in transitioning young people from face-to-face work-based experiences. And of course, COVID hit right before the summer months, and most of us that hire young persons for summer jobs, we were kind of – we had this situation where we had to transition some of these young people into virtual experiences.

And I wanted to make sure – this slide is not clear, but we have three presenters. We have Brian Walker, Monica Chavis, as well as Denise Higgs. And we are – I'm very excited to say that we have a young youth student participant, a part of this program, who's going to share her experience, Marissa Edwin.

So I am excited to have them with us and I am – Brian, you're going to take over for me on the slides?

BRIAN WALKER: Yes, Monica's going to take over here from the slides.

MS. MEMINGER: OK. Monica, you've got the slides?

MONICA CHAVIS: I've got the slides.

MS. MEMINGER: Perfect. Go ahead.

MR. WALKER: All right. Well, hello to everybody. And thank you so much for inviting us to come on to share our experience. So what basically happened with us is when Prince George's County public schools basically had shut down due to COVID-19, we knew our summer internship program was going to be affected.

So what we did was we came up with a virtual learning-based program that we knew we could still have our employers connect with the students that we work with in Prince George's County schools.

So by June we came up with a virtual-based program. And we had planned for maybe 111 students to participate with us, but only about 17 students actually participated with us. So from June 1st to June 29th this is what we did.

We created a framework. And in that framework we have of course six industry career paths, of course we're going to talk about the weekly schedule, our employer engagement, the job readiness, and of course we have Marissa that's going to come on and speak with us about her experience.

So what we did was we worked with Prince George's County schools and they have what's called the CTE program, or the career and technical education programs. And as you can see here on the screen, some of the programs that we worked with within Prince George's County of course are the business and finance, the culinary arts, cosmetology, information technology – or better known as IT – we have health care and we also work with construction.

So as we look at our weekly schedule, we try to figure out how can we make this fun for our students and make this relevant to them as well? So we broke each individual career path down to a one-week presentation, where we worked with them of course from 10:00 to 1:00. They worked about 15 hours in a week's time period.

In the last two weeks, as you can see here on the screen, we had two cohorts; one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

And from there, I'll let my co-worker Denise Higgs come in and talk about our employer engagement.

DENISE HIGGS: Thank you, Brian. Employer engagement was a key component to our overall program design. Prior to the pandemic, I regularly kept in contact with our employer partners. And then after everything shut down, I would do touch points with them. And when I told them that the summer internships were going to be cancelled, I said, well, we had already started planning a virtual work-based opportunity for our students and would they be on board?

Some of them said that they didn't know how that would work because they were so used to the students coming into their workplaces. However, I did get a lot of yeses when I told them about the virtual work opportunity for our students. I said it would be a commitment of three hours. I said that I had a template that I would send them and all they had to do was just fill in the information.

Then, after they said yes, then they came based on their designated cohort and they presented their virtual work-based learning projects to the students. Some mixed it with a mini-workshop and then some would just do the project itself. They came back on that Wednesday and participated in the guest speaker day. And the students were allowed to interact with them and ask them any question that they wanted to.

And then on that Friday, the employers came back and they watched and proudly listened to the work-based learning projects presented by the students. And they gave them feedback at the end. And then we saw something happening. It organically turned into a mentoring session. And that happened with all of our cohorts.

And as you can see here, we incorporated job readiness training into all of our – into all – the whole week. And the students learned about how to build a smartphone app, or they increased in or learned about critical thinking or problem solving skills. But all around, we thought that it was beneficial for the student.

And since I'm talking about students, let me introduce you to my colleague Monica Chavis who will share with you more about our student engagement. Monica?

MS. CHAVIS: Thank you so much, Denise. So what is this virtual experience without students? And so as Brian mentioned, we recruit through our public school system for students who are in different career training courses. And they (fit ?) in those courses based on the employers that we worked with and we matched them based on their experience and their desires.

One of the things that we did a lot of was online etiquette. So we talked a lot about professionalism and how to present yourselves. We don't always talk about that in an online environment, and so we talked a lot and discussed a lot about background on the Zoom call. We talked about being in a place where you're not laying down in the bed with your blanket on. And so all of those things that you don't think about teaching – (inaudible) – as far as online etiquette.

And then we had a question-and-answer segment with relevant topics. So those questions and answers were kind of about COVID and how they were affected in this new environment. And for the most part they – we had a lot of graduates. So they were upset that they didn't get an opportunity to have a whole experience with graduation. But aside from that, they couldn't – they have taken COVID pretty well.

And then we did pre- and post-assessments to see if there's a skills gain. So on the first day we did some assessments and on the last day of course that presentation, along with feedback, showed some skills gain. And they completed the work-based learning project, which was awesome for most of our participants. And they earned $150 stipend.

And so I think that when we talk about how this works, it's best if you hear it from the people that it's working for. So I'm going to allow Marissa to talk to you about what her experience was in this environment and any takeaways that she has. Marissa?

MARISSA EDWIN: Thank you, Ms. Chavis. Good afternoon to all. My name is Marissa and I am a recent graduate from the Prince George's County public schools and this will be an upcoming freshman of the Pennsylvania State University, studying accounting with a minor in criminal justice.

So I had an opportunity of being a part of the first ever virtual business cohort that was hosted by the Youth Career Coalition Program. So because of the coronavirus outbreak, the in-person sessions, like Ms. Chavis stated, were prohibited for our protection. So in order to keep us young people engaged and productive, they created the first ever virtual business cohort, which I was a part of during the first week, which lasted from Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

And during this week, the members of the Awesome Three, which I had a pleasure of being a part of, participated – we participated in several activities that allowed the three of us to be aware of who we are as an individual. So the business cohort only had three people in my section, not within the whole cohort.

So during this week we also were given a project from the (Fountain Firm ?) and we were financial analysts who must provide an actual plan to the CEO of a company on how to mitigate the high risk of losing revenue, employees, during the COVID-19 outbreak.

I would say personally I found this project very challenging as it relates to – (inaudible) – and we're only high school students. So it was a bit of a challenge. But based on the feedback we got from the employers who actually gave us the project, I felt it was a great success and we did good for high school students taking on a real-life scenario.

So I feel the experience for this business cohort was very beneficial. As stated earlier, I plan to study accounting in college. I believe – I wish the course was longer than a week because there was so much information given. And also, being that it was just the three of us, the time went by pretty quickly but also we were able to obtain more information than it was if it was a larger group.

So I was happy and really enjoyed that it helped me to stay engaged and better myself as an individual and as a business professional.

MR. WALKER: Thank you so much, Marissa, for giving us your feedback and how you liked the program. And we are super happy about your – (inaudible) – thank you.

MS. EDWIN: Thank you.

MR. WALKER: Here's our contact information.

MS. MEMINGER: OK. Thank you, Brian. Thank you, Monica. Thank you, Denise. And most importantly, thank you Marissa, for sharing your experience with us. And you said you want it to last longer, but I'm so glad you're a part of this kind of innovative cohort so we can see if we can do that again next year for a longer period of time.

There are some questions about the program and I just wanted to ask Brian maybe a couple of questions, if you could answer these for me, regarding who provided the stipend. And could you just share with the colleagues that information?

MR. WALKER: Yeah. So we – what happens is that we – of course – (inaudible) – Prince George's, we receive state and local grants as well as (some ?) funding as well. So we had budgeted for the summer program so we could connect with our students.

MS. MEMINGER: Exactly. Don't forget, if you have additional questions for our colleagues, here are their contact information. You also of course have the PowerPoint slides to email them directly and they'll let us know if there's any questions that we need to help out with.

So I don't want to rush us, but we are over a couple minutes. I do want to just share a couple questions. I'm not going to do my polling question. But I do want to know, you know, at the Division of Youth Services we always ask you all if there are any additional technical assistance needs you need from us regarding youth services right now and in the future? Please type those into the chat area for us. Is there anything you're burning to know about that we should be looking ahead to kind of provide TA on or do a podcast or one-pagers?

Again, this webinar is birthed out of the fact that you all asked – many of you guys who were on the first webinar May 4th asked for this. And so we want to make sure that we're meeting your needs in TA, that we're meeting your goals and helping meet your goals.

While you guys type that into the chat, I want to spend a couple minutes saying thank you to our presenters. This was an amazing, amazing webinar. We had over 1,000 people on here we were learning from you all. They're asking for documents. They're looking to connect to you. So don't be alarmed if your emails are blowing up tomorrow.

And again, keep typing in the chat area any type of TA needs.

I'm going to ask you guys – I'm going to move forward a little bit – just there's some highlights here. We shared those earlier, some resources that we have.

What I want to give you all is my – our email. This is our email address. What we're looking to do in the next couple of months – and as you all know, we have the Youth Resource Connection newsletter, which is a monthly newsletter that we produce here at the U.S Department of Labor Division of Youth Services. We have close to 80,000 people who receive that monthly newsletter from us.

And if you want to read the archived newsletters, they are on youth.workforcegps.org. They're on the front page. You can get the last three years of archived newsletters that we have produced monthly.

What we're looking to do over the next couple months is highlight the field, what you all are doing in this virtual space for meeting the needs of young people in this time – this trying time of the pandemic as well as protests and how you're meeting their needs.

So we would like to do monthly highlights, maybe a couple of programs. We want to write articles for our Youth Resource Connection. If you're interested in that – we already have people who have already emailed me this week – please send us an email. If you have any additional questions for the U.S. Department of Labor Division of Youth Services, you know where to reach us, at youth.services@dol.gov.

If you want to have – you want your product highlighted, we review those. We have a panel review process that we make sure that it's nonproprietary. We upload what folks are doing in the field. We like to highlight that on our community of practice because there's a place – we have over 10,000 members who are looking for those bits of information to make sure that they're meeting the needs of their young people and their community.

So please, by all means, stay in contact with us. We have been answering questions – (inaudible) – we've been having phone calls and highlighting tools. And we really want to make sure we level up what you guys are doing. So please stay in touch with us. We appreciate you all. We thank you all for your hard work.

Again, thank you, colleagues, for being on this amazing webinar. You guys stay online with us. Don't go anywhere.

But for the rest of the country, Laura has some closing words and we look forward to working with you in the future.

(END)