**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Summer-at-a-Glance: Building Workforce Opportunities for Youth during Challenging Times**

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JONATHAN VEHLOW: Welcome to "Summer-at-a-Glance: Building Workforce Opportunities for Youth during Challenging Times."

So without further ado, I’d like to kick things off to our moderator today, Maisha Meminger, manpower analyst, Division of Youth Services, Employment and Training Administration with the U.S. Department of Labor. Maisha?

MAISHA MEMINGER: Good afternoon and good morning, colleagues. Thank you so much, Jon, and to the Maher team for your continued support as we at the Division of Youth Services promote a technical assistance to help build better bridges for our young people.

My name is Maisha Meminger. I will be your moderator for today's amazing webinar. We are not only looking forward to hearing from our panelists that come from a variety of areas in our country, including the rural area, but we want to hear from you. We'll talk about how we do that today.

Today, we have four amazing speakers. First, we have Mariama Sesay who is our Division of Youth Services virtual intern. She's a senior at Bowie State University, and she's going to be sharing with us her experience as a summer work -- work experience of doing summer work during COVID. And I'm so proud of her and so happy to have her with us.

We also have Heather Pipkin. Heather is going to be sharing her experience. She's a director of program for the Workforce Development Board of Eastern Arkansas with over a decade of experience in what is now WIOA, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

She also has over three years' experience in the SNAP Employment and training program. Heather is a member of the Americans JobLink Alliance Committee, National Association of Workforce Development Professionals and Chair of the Workforce Development Task Force in Phillips County. She regularly attends training sessions to keep up to date with changes provided by the work -- the Department of Labor and the Division of Workforce Services.

Next, we have with us Sally Payne. Sally is going to be sharing her experience with us as well. Sally is the interim director of workforce development for the city of Springfield, Missouri, in the Ozark region. She has been employed by the city since 2008 after several years as a cost accountant in the private sector.

Her work force career began with the finance team as the accountant -- accounting supervisor and was promoted to the fiscal manager -- administrator in 2013. In July of 2015, she was directly promoted to the position of assistant director, where she managed the Skills, Career Services, Youth, and Missouri Work Assistance Team supervisors and their respective programs. She was named interim director December 2019.

We also have with us Blythe Brunner. She's currently the project director for the Workforce Solutions in North Central region of Pennsylvania. She brings 29 years of experience of workforce development serving WIA Title I, TANF EARN (sp), and TANF youth programs in rural six county -- in a rural six-county region. She served on the federal statewide custom center design team four out-of-school youth outreach and recruitment.

So we have a really amazing myriad of speakers today and panelists, and I hope that we will learn from them today.

So what are today's objectives? First of all, we want to make sure that you all are going to get some tools on how to build or increase or improve your current summer initiatives.

Now, we know the landscape today, ladies and gentlemen. COVID took us for loop last year. Last time we had a really large webinar was in May of 2020. As -- sorry. Thank you -- as we all were kind of put into the forefront of going virtual, going hybrid, thinking of ways to engage our young people.

A lot of our young people around the country lost their jobs over the summer, were picked over because adults who have larger families were in need of employment. And so a lot of our young people were not able to be engaged.

Also last year, a lot of companies, a lot of nonprofits that would have hired our young people as interns, as employees, struggled with positioning themselves to be able to onboard virtually.

So we want to make sure that we look at the challenges that we had in COVID and some of the challenges we may have coming up and how we can, again, work through those.

We're going to share some practices and operating plans because, again, these are still challenging times. Though we are having some regulations lifted in some states, it's still challenging on how to get young people into a workforce experience that will best benefit then and, of course, give them a paid workforce experience as well.

We also want to encourage peer sharing. So the setup of this -- today's panel discussion is we're going to hear from our panelists first. And we could take questions at any time in the chat because the chat will be closed first. But in end 00 at the end of that question, we're going to open up the chat to hear from you all.

So if you have an answer or a suggestion or another question around that situation we're going to be talking about, please add it to the chat. What we try to do in these kind of panel chat discussions -- and we did it last year when we had the first COVID conversation -- is we take that information you share with us and we put it into a tip sheet or we kind of follow up to make sure that everybody learned from today.

So if there's some innovative practice that you're doing, some challenges that you're having you want to share, something that you have a burning question about, let's get that into the chat and let's share. So we're going to try to make this as interactive as possible.

So we're going to get started off by hearing from Mariama Sesay, who is our, again, Division of Youth Services intern. So Mariama, I think we're going to get you on camera. Hi.

MARIAMA SESAY: Hello. Hi, everyone. Are you all able to see me?

MS. MEMINGER: Yes. We are. So, Mariama, tell us a little bit about your experience, and let us know how your summer experiences of last year, what your plans are.

MS. SESAY: OK. No problem. So thank you for the introduction, Maisha. My name is Mariama Sesay. I'm a graduating senior at Bowie State University majoring in Child and Adolescent Studies.

I currently serve as a technical assistance intern with the Division of Youth Services at the Department of Labor. And I am pleased to welcome you all to the Summer-At-A-Glance webinar. I'm very excited to hear and learn from our speakers today because, as a former participant myself of summer youth programs, I understand how vital the learning experience in that I acquired still impact me today as a young adult.

For instance, in the summer of 2015 and 2016, I participated in the Green Zone Environmental Program through the Marion Berry Summer Youth Employment Program, which exposed me to ways that I can take care of my environment.

Although it is simple, one of the biggest takeaways that I still keep in mind today is that bicycling and walking are healthy and not only for myself but for my planet, as opposed to driving.

Also, I participated in beautification projects where the other participants and myself collected loose trash and helped to develop a park in what is considered the poorest regions of Washington, DC.

Experiences as such showed the importance of continuing summer youth opportunities for eligible youth. This past year, when the pandemic abruptly hit, was the first time in seven years that I did not have any summer work experience. I was unfortunately laid off at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where I worked in the gift shop as a sales associates and was hoping to remain there still to this day.

As we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the workforce for many individuals like myself. However, as we continue to be resilient and find new ways to overcome this employment barrier, it will be possible for programs such as the summer youth employment opportunities to continue operating.

Fortunately, I was granted a virtual internship experience through the State Department, which is why I'm here today talking to you all lovely people. I learned about this opportunity through a friend of mine who was told about it through a federal employee.

While at the Department of Labor, I have worked alongside hardworking individuals and students like myself who all have the agenda of improving the life outcomes of every youth in our country.

I was recently hired at the Cheesecake Factory where I'll be working as a cashier and to-go person. I have also applied for the DC Summer Youth Employment Program and I am still waiting to hear back about my job placement, which will be held virtually. I am hoping that these jobs will sustain me financially as I go on to pursue my master's degree in education policy. Thank you all for your time and your listening ears.

MS. MEMINGER: Mariama, amazing. We're so happy to hear from you. We're happy. I just want to spend a couple of seconds with you right now just talking about the fact that you had a job. You had an employment opportunity. In March you got laid off. How did you feel about that?

MS. SESAY: It was -- I was overwhelmed because I'm like, how am I going to pay for my transportation? How am I going to pay for books for the upcoming semester? So I was just overwhelmed with so many emotions.

MS. MEMINGER: I mean, so exactly. So you're like a lot of our young people around the country. They had a summer gig. They got interviewed, they were hoping to have this wonderful summer experience. And because it was face to face or hybrid type of program, they were not able to stay on board with that opportunity.

And so when you talk about coming up this summer, you've applied to the DC Summer Youth Program, what are you hearing? And are you hearing that there's opportunities for you coming up? Or are you hopeful that there'll be opportunity for you, or what are you feeling right now about your perspective for the 2021 summer opportunity?

MS. SESAY: So the Marionberry Summer Youth Employment Program will be up and running. I have heard that all of the job opportunities will be online. And so right now, I'm in the process of going through orientation, and in a few months, I should be hearing back about where I will be placed.

MS. MEMINGER: And this is a paid opportunity?

MS. SESAY: Yes.

MS. MEMINGER: Yay. Mariam, it's so good to have you, and I'm so happy that you're going to stay on with us and we're going to get to our panel discussion. So everybody --people gave you shout-outs in a chat congratulating you on graduation and your master's degree. And we are so happy to have you as our virtual intern this year. We've had you for a whole year. So thank you so much.

MS. SESAY: Thank you.

MS. MEMINGER: So, Jon, can we go back off of camera for a second so that I can get set up for our panel discussion?

So I thank Mariama once more for sharing her thoughts with us.

So next, we are going to go into our panel. So, Heather, Sally, Blythe, you want to join me on camera as we start our conversation? And I'm so happy to have you guys.

Hi, everybody.

BLYTHE BRUNNER: Hello.

MS. MEMINGER: Hi. Good to see you all. Let's get started. So the first question I wanted to ask you all was, summer -- 2020 was an odd year; right? We started off amazingly in January and February. Everything was normal. And then you had this March -- kind of mid-March, and it was wild. We were on lockdown. We had different restrictions. We had to wear masks. We didn't have to see -- wear masks. We didn't know what was going on.

And so in 2020, can you tell me how did your summer employment opportunity -- excuse me -- 2019. So the year before 2020, let's talk about before the COVID outbreak. How did your summer job opportunity differ in previous years besides 2020?

So I'm going to start off with you, Heather. How did your summer jobs before COVID differ?

HEATHER PIPKIN: When COVID first hit, we were actually in the high schools providing quarterly workshops. We were also in the high schools registering students with the Arkansas JobLink for the NCRC.

So recruiting of the in-school youth was a lot easier in 2019 than it was in 2020 because, like you said, with the pandemic, us getting inside the high schools and schools being shut down was -- it wasn't possible. It wasn't going to happen. So we had to reevaluate how we were operating and how we were going to recruit. And we even had to reevaluate our work sites because those were shut down as well. So it was a drastic change in 2020 than in 2019.

MS. MEMINGER: So you're sharing with us recruitment, actually having your hands or your eyes on a child?

MS. PIPKIN: Yes. Yes. In 2019, we actually had our hands and our eyes on there. We were -- like I said, we were inside the schools, felt the -- an awareness of the programs and the opportunities and the services that they -- that were available to them.

In 2020, it was just all switched. We had to come up with new ways to actually get the students, and I just want to say thanks to the partners because we was able to receive a lot of referrals from our partners in 2020.

MS. MEMINGER: We're definitely going to come to that part of partnerships. We want to talk about that. So, Blythe, can you share with us your experience 2019 versus 2020? How did your program -- your summer program differ right before COVID?

MS. BRUNNER: So good to see everybody. I can only see a couple, but it's nice to see we have people from all over the nation today. I'm so excited to have the opportunity to share with you today.

We were out on the streets scheduling our work experiences, not having a problem with recruitment or marketing or partners or employers, and then all of a sudden on March 17th, it was -- not only did our CareerLinks return to telework, but a lot of employers stopped working. All of our work sites, I would say 90 percent of them were closing their doors as well to telework. So in our region, it was trying to figure out what we were going to do going forward.

MS. MEMINGER: And I want to emphasize, I mean, you put -- you said there -- you talked about the partners. It wasn't just affecting the opportunities, but even the employees of our employment partners were now removed from the office space and put at home. So even that was a shift. And even we started working from home too 100 percent.

So even trying to connect a young person to an opportunity with one of our partners was also a challenge. So we talked about recruitment, partnerships. So we're going to wrap it up. Sally, you want to wrap us up with how was it different between 2019 and 2020?

SALLY PAYNE: Sure. Thank you, and thanks again for having us today. And I agree with my colleagues. I mean, I don't think anybody was untouched from the pandemic. I think we all struggled in our own different ways.

We couldn't go into the schools anymore. We were having trouble -- sometimes before it was a bit clunky, the services, because you can't technically expend and serve until they're enrolled. And it was -- we were having trouble reaching the rural communities.

We're the third largest city in the state of Missouri. So we're more of a mid-sized urban area, but we do serve the counties that are more rural. Now that it's 100 percent virtual, what we're doing, everything is instantaneous. The kids don't have to wait to be enrolled. We can serve them a lot quicker.

But, you know, it's interesting. When we shut our doors in March of 2020, we were the first job center in the state of Missouri to reopen to the public around the end of May. I think we all just thought people were just going to come back in just like they normally did. And when that didn't happen, it really caused us to change our mind of what we're going to do and how we're going to do it.

We had used social media before to reach our kids, but we had to utilize different platforms. We had to increase that social media presence. Facebook live. We just had to think and reinvent everything we did because they weren't coming in and we were worried and we were running the risk of not meeting those youth enrollment performance measures, numbers, and expenditures.

MS. MEMINGER: So, Sally, I want to kind of piggyback on some of the things that you said. We had a great youth panel in December. We had about eight young people from around the country on. And we think they were social media savvy, but these young people jump from platform to platform to platform, what's hot and what's not. And we're old because we still use Facebook.

Was there one social media platform or maybe a few that you really were like, we had to be on it because our young people were there? Can you share with us what were those, if you have any?

MS. PAYNE: Yeah. That's funny. I mean, yeah. Facebook is somewhat antiquated now; right? But we still use it. I mean, we did take to Facebook live. We have a very good relationship, too, with our media partners, our NBC, CBS, and ABC affiliates in town. So that's really helpful.

I will say, when we put our virtual work experience application online, even though it was Facebook, we were getting applications from the entire state, not just our region, because the sharing ability of that is so heavy. So it kept getting shared and shared and shared. We finally had to remove it from social media but -- because it was just too much and we knew we couldn't fill all those slots. But that's a great problem to have. But we knew we were doing something right.

But Twitter, of course, utilizing Twitter is huge. But any kind of social media. We haven't yet gone down the TikTok path. I'm trying to get our staff to think about how we can utilize that, because that seems to be the hot thing right now. So I'd love to hear somebody out there that's utilizing TikTok, but that's the next best thing.

MS. MEMINGER: Yeah. I -- we were presenting with some colleagues with HUD and their -- the ROSS grantees, and they would have their young people make TikTok videos about interviewing skills and how to get dressed properly for an interview. And they would have the kids do this little TikTok. They would get out their sweats. And so there's a lot of wonderful fun ways to engage in TikTok.

And also, I wanted to bring up another point that you talked about was some of the benefits of COVID. I can't believe I'm saying that, but maybe -- (inaudible) -- COVID is that things were instantaneous; right? We were able to get our kids enrolled, if we had the right forms online. We were able to get our kids services, link them to resources immediately.

And, like you said, one of the challenges was we opened up in May, and nobody came because we made it so easy for them to still be at home, to still be in their safe space, and still receive services.

And so I thank you for that, because that was a quick turnaround from March to May where folks were like, well, I don't have to necessarily come in right now. I can wait because I could still get my services, connect to a case manager, somebody who -- to help me. That's amazing.

So right now, colleagues, what we're going to do is open up our chat, and we're going to ask you all the same question there. And we have several hundred people online. So you guys can go ahead and have fun.

How did your programs that you're working with in youth differ from 2019 or 2020? What were some of the benefits of you not having to be in a situation where we were over restricted? Where there some things that you took away from that and you struggle with?

So we're going to open up our chat for about two minutes. So, Jon, I think the chat -- is it open yet, or do I need to -- do we have to have camera?

MR. VEHLOW: Yeah. Hang on. We're having a little bit of a slowdown right now. So we're just moving that. We'll move over that right now. It should be loading here in a second, but if they want to enter for now while we're waiting for that into that closed chat, we'll get that open chat up. Just -- (inaudible) -- slowdown right now.

MS. MEMINGER: So we have a couple questions. I'll take a couple questions while you try to get to chat up. I have two questions so far, and I'm going to ask them -- those two questions really quickly.

First question asks, "How do you provide a virtual work experience for a youth that is a minor? How does a youth receive that supervision from the employer?"

So there's a question in a chat to asks about that. Does anybody have an answer to that question or suggestion or how -- if you have a young person under the age of 18 and they're granting a virtual experience, how is supervision? How do we do that?

MS. PAYNE: Well, our program is a work preparedness. So they're not having a virtual experience with an actual employer. So that's one way to do it because we don't have to worry about the employer supervision piece of it.

MS. MEMINGER: Anybody else?

MS. BRUNNER: We're located in a six-county region in Pennsylvania, and we are very rural. What we did is we were along those same lines where we ended up with a brainstorm with all of our partners, employers, and agencies and board to figure out what are some life skills, whether are giving back to the community. A couple of the days that we did, just an example, are we did a self-discovery day, a budgeting day, quiz magical computer day, give back day.

So what we ended up finding in our region was it wasn't realistic to have our youth join us from 10:00 to 4:00, as an example, and try and manage them that way. So we came up with -- we're going to talk later in the session about a couple of ideas where they joined us from 10:00 to 11:00. We went over some information, and then they joined us back at 12:00 and we went over the information that maybe they researched or they called an employer during that time.

Or one of the successes that we had during our give back day was we actually provided our youth -- all of our youth work experience in this scenario virtual with a backpack that had all of the items that they needed for our virtual program.

So in other words, one of the things that was in there was a bottle of water, a sticky label that you put on it with a note card. And one of the things that our youth did is they thanked their post carrier for delivering the mail. And we also have success stories. And I may share later if there's time. But giving back to the community was a big day for our region.

MS. MEMINGER: OK.

MS. BRUNNER: So -- (inaudible) -- having to have that supervisor, but we used them coming back and sharing with the group as -- that they put their time in during those hours. Thank you.

MS. MEMINGER: OK. That sounds amazing, and I think that there's another question that kind of relates to what we were just talking about it is, "How are other areas implementing education component of work experience?"

And I think what I'm hearing from the panelists and I'm looking at the chat and going back and forth is people are using Zoom and other conference applications to provide this educational leadership component, service component so that young people can sign in, get one or two hours of a service and be able to, again, share out what they're learning.

And so I think that you -- creating a curriculum -- somebody asked about curriculum development, how you -- how are you delivering virtual curriculum for workforce?

Again, getting creative, having speakers come in. I'm hearing from you guys, and you guys can jump in at any time. And so I'm hearing that we are -- and people are typing in open chat and the closed chat. So I'll just trying to make sure that we get everything.

There is a question about the social media piece, about have any of you guys used YouTube as a tool? You have? You want to share some -- you're nodding your head. You want to share if you use YouTube before

OK.

MS. PIPKIN: Yeah. We have not --

MS. MEMINGER: All right.

MS. PIPKIN: -- used YouTube.

MS. MEMINGER: You have not used YouTube. OK. So I know YouTube is a huge hit with saving videos and having a YouTube channel for your workforce development activities, directing young people to the YouTube for extracurricular information, extra educational information. So that seems to be an opportunity as well.

So we can -- I think, colleagues, keep typing in the chat. We're -- I'm reading off the chat. I'm looking at questions. I thank you for them. And so we're going to be answering questions throughout, really making sure that we kind of talk to you guys.

Again, I see Diana was sharing with us in a chat that employers declined to really participate in 2020. We talked to -- Mariama spoke to that where employers just couldn't give an opportunity for young people to participate because it was not possible.

So, again, Don, thank you for sharing that you have used YouTube as a teacher -- a teaching tool for financial literacy.

And I'm going to ruin your name. Julisia (sp), I think, is asking, "Can some of you good folks that have you YouTube share some of those links in the chat so that we can connect and see what you guys are doing, get some brainstorm ideas for us as well as we go on?"

So I'm going to go to the next question. You guys keep on having fun. Keep chatting. We love it. And, Cameron (sp), I want to say -- (inaudible) -- because you bring up a good point.

Working with homeless youth. So last year we had a great webinar on -- in May regarding what people were trying to start doing. And we have a tip sheet on that. And on that we talk about housing insecurities and homeless youth, and we didn't know at the beginning of COVID there was challenges working with homeless youth because of accessibility to computers and accessibility to the internet.

Now, that was in May of last year. Things had changed over time. Internet companies have become more viable and more resilient and really giving opportunities to young people to connect. Also, school systems are open to allowing giving students a computer to help out.

Now, I have my boss on the line, and I'm going to ask her this question clearly. There was a question on the table last year about using WIOA funds to pay for technology components, if it was -- if the other person was enrolled in our program and they needed technology to either work or go to school.

We have guidance on that as well. And yes. If your young person is enrolled in the WIOA program, you can use funds to connect that young person to technology pieces, such as laptops, Chromebook, or computers to allow them to connect. So that is a yes. So therefore, there are some -- again, some guidance on that. So you guys can check that out, if you are part of the WIOA program. So thank you for those questions that are coming in.

So we're going to talk about innovation, and innovation came in different ways last year; right? We had innovation in technology we just talked about, innovation in supportive services, connecting young people to, again, food and housing needs. We had innovation as far as incorporating business partners and how do we keep our partnerships strong when we couldn't see each other? And it's also creating virtual workforce experiences.

So I'm going to want -- I'm going to go through my list again, and I'm going to probably start with Blythe. What innovative practices did you implement in 2020 that worked for you in the midst of the height of COVID?

MS. BRUNNER: So in our six-county region in the state of Pennsylvania, one of the things that we had to do was do grasp, how do we use the equipment tools? How do we use technology? Because not only was it new to the customers we were serving, but it was on a level new to us as well.

We had never worked from home before, so that was probably a challenge, number one. But then when we had our staff come together and we brainstormed what we wanted this three-week program to be in June for our youth work experience opportunity, we -- (inaudible) -- staff from partners in our local CareerLink. We had our Workforce Solutions board staff. We had employees. We had agencies that came together to offer -- how do we offer these 15 days, as an example?

Our next challenge was, how do we get the materials that we want our work experience customers to do to them? So it was a lot of, well, we all know that our centers were closed. So it was a lot of working with so many partners. We could not have pulled it off on our own. It was, like I said, the CareerLink Partners, Workforce Solutions board staff, employers, agencies.

And, basically, we met and did a drawstring bag and it had all of the items that they needed during this 15-day program. And, basically, it was pretty much a drop off on a porch. So it was dropping those off.

The other thing that we found was that there were some of our youth that were struggling to connect because I think everybody's aware that in our rural area, as an example, I always use, we don't have a Starbucks in our six-county region. So that's pretty rural.

Depending on what town you're going through, there might be one stoplight during -- through that town. So we were challenged with some areas did not have the technology capability that other areas did. But when we were doing our recruitment, we actually ended up with some students that knew each other and parents knew each other. So we actually had a couple circumstances where a student went to their friend's house and joined our summer youth program during -- in that way.

So we were trying to think outside the box as much as we could, and we really used the strength of our coworkers because we would have a session for -- we had sessions 15 days in a row. And we all know, when your video doesn't work or your camera doesn't work or you're having trouble connecting. So in the background, we actually had people on the phone with people trying to get them connected.

So we didn't have a lot of increased support services at that time, but we definitely have had them since we came back in July. Where we are, we have been looking in our region with technology. And just recently, our board through the Pennsylvania CareerLink has now offered a lending library. So we have computers that can be lent out for these services, as well as offering Wi-Fi in our parking lot.

MS. MEMINGER: You know what? My favorite thing is the Wi-Fi in the parking lot. Let me just -- let me just stop, park right there.

When we had a conversation early in COVID, rural partners, partners in suburbia were asking restaurants to keep their internet on, to take off the passcode, to let young people literally cop a squat outside of their location. They're not open, but to access the internet in restaurants, libraries, schools, even our own offices around the country, in the One-Stop centers that were closed were willing to do that for young people.

And you saw pictures of kids all over the country sitting down, logging in, getting free internet. And that -- as a partnership, that was so important during the beginning of COVID and even to this very day. You still have young people that are having access issues. So I think that's amazing.

Also, what I learned from you is giving the young people materials; right? So we want a young person to have a workforce experience. It's best that the employer partner or us, we provide them what they're going to need, paper, pencils, pens. I know it sounds elementary, ladies and gentlemen, but a lot of our young people that we're working with have severe challenges to accessing education and employment. They have barriers to access.

So what we take for granted, having erasers and pencils at home and paper, a lot of our young people just don't have it. And I know some companies were even providing them with computers so they could have that workforce experience.

So I thank you for having the little grab bags and doing the porch drop off. I think that's so amazing, and I appreciate the innovation.

So, Heather, I'm going to go to you next. Can you share with us what your innovation practices were in 2020?

MS. PIPKIN: Well, since all the centers were closed and they couldn't come in, we took it outside. We had our first job fairs outside. We had our awareness and recruitment events outside. We met our participants and customers outside. We just literally took everything outside to them. That way we would still abide by the CDC guidelines.

As far as the work experience goes, yes. We lost a lot of businesses. Yes. A lot of work sites shut down, but in the process, there was also a lot that was being overwhelmed, like the utility assistance programs. They had applications. They were so overwhelmed. The city's sanitation. There was a lot of business that was so overwhelmed, but due to COVID, didn't have the employees to work.

So what we did is we partnered with businesses that was overwhelmed and used those as work sites. Like the utility assistance program, they were six months behind on applications. We put participants there that were hired within 30 days. We had an in-school youth at the utilities here in West Memphis, Arkansas. He was hired by actually providing him a scholarship to go on to school to do his programing.

So with us being able to take it outside and reevaluate how we were operating and with everybody else becoming overwhelmed, we were able to utilize that and still keep basically the same practices of 2019 just in a different scenario.

MS. MEMINGER: I absolutely love that idea of partnering with employers that were overwhelmed and had a shortage in employee -- there was a place for our young people to be placed and to be trained to help that area. And I think that's amazing thinking outside the box.

Do you need help; right? Do you need help? And also, some programs that we've learned about over the year throughout the nation, they hire youth from within their program to help them do social media pushes. They use the interns as -- they use them as interns, paid and unpaid, depending on what the money looked like. So they had young people answering phones. They had young people also -- again, the big one was social media. I think that's where they had the young people doing videos and camera shots and having them participate that way.

So, again, not only partnering where there may be a lack or a need, but also hiring from within, letting young people work for our programs as well. So I thank you so much, Heather, for those innovations that you shared with us.

And, Sally, I'm going to end up with you. What innovative practices did you all implement?

MS. PAYNE: Well, we were having trouble getting the kids. I mean, so kind of twofold. The employers were still trying to work through their prior workforce and bringing those people back on, rightfully so, but we were having trouble getting the kids. They weren't coming in. I would say a lot of parents were very apprehensive and not very open to letting their kids go back to traditional employment.

So that's why we took everything virtual. And the COVID guidance from ETA would allow for work preparedness, and we did it virtually. So our program was set up like an online -- typical online college course; right? And they have choices.

Now, we can do traditional if they want. And I love it because it gives the kids more options; right? So they can do traditional. They can do a hybrid, so part-time online, part-time traditional, or they can do all virtual. And I will say the majority, if not all of them, want all traditional.

When we put that out there, we saw more youth applicants in three weeks than we had in the prior year and a half to almost two years. So in just three weeks, and that was amazing.

But it's ran like a typical college course online. We use Google Classroom. So if you're familiar with Blackboard or Canvas or whatever. So all assignments are there, and then they just go through their assignments. They're due by 11:59 p.m. on a certain night. They're all assigned, and they might do job search. They might do a day in the life. They'll have a question of the week. They'll have video of the week, weekly quizzes.

We can scale it also to their particular interest. So we have a lot of youth saying, oh, I want to do IT. Well, really, what does that mean? So it gives them the opportunity to explore different areas of IT work; right?

And it's so interesting because we always say kids and youth are really, really technologically savvy. And while that may be true, you have a toddler working an iPhone. Let's be real. They are not prepared for the working world and especially -- (inaudible) -- work. I mean, you have to have -- it takes a different skill set, and it's challenging for adults.

So it's really giving that pre-work, work preparedness experience, and what our intention is then to change and transition them once they're complete with their -- they earn certificates along the way. Once they're complete with this, we'll transition them to a traditional work experience.

It's resolved their transportation issue, which is a huge barrier nationwide. I mean, it's -- everybody has to struggle with it. But that used to be our biggest line item in our budget as far as supportive services. And now it's gone.

What has increased is technology, but that's okay. We do purchase laptops, if needed, hotspots, if connectivity is an issue. I will say in our urban and Springfield area, most of the users we find are -- they have laptops or they've got connectivity or they can pick it up. But for the rural kids and our other rural counties, it's really important.

So -- and I would say as far as businesses, as we start working to move that towards more traditional, we hope to keep this as kind of an onboarding to a traditional work experience. That's our hope. We're really hopeful that DOL ETA will support that. That's just a plug. I'm just saying.

But what we're doing now with some of our -- thank you for making that phone call right now.

But what we're doing with some of our other grants, we're leveraging some other grants. We have a COVID grant for adults, working with a local health clinic, placing people there. But we're using that to kind of leverage that partnership, to prepare that partnership to be more receptive when they haven't taken our youth previously. So we're trying to leverage our other programs and grants to bring on new partners with our youth experience.

MS. MEMINGER: Absolutely love it. And I'm looking at the chat, and I'm absolutely loving you guys sharing back and forth. And I think that is absolutely amazing, Sally. That was innovative. I appreciate you sharing those tips too.

A couple things I'm seeing in the chat that I want to highlight right now. You all are discussing between wages and stipends. Well, I want to let you know, last week the Division of Youth Services just put out a tip sheet on wages and stipends. Can one of my colleagues please put that link in the chat for everyone?

If you want to know where the appropriate ways to use stipends and wages, we work with Wage and Hour. I want to give a shout out to my colleague Lashawn Nampa (sp) who led that initiative that's been going for years, if folks want to know how to do wage. And thank you, Sarah. How to do wage. What's a wage? What's a stipend?

That is a wonderful collaboration that we did with Wage and Hour. So please check that out. We just released that about a week ago. So that is now there for you guys to have and to look those over.

Also, I'm seeing in the chat the differences between -- do we have tips on homeless youth? Yes. We have all this. Now, hopefully, you all are a part of the WorkforceGPS community. Everything that we do in Division of Youth Services is there.

So there is the tip sheet that I was referring to happened during our May webinar. I will have a link in the back of this presentation to the tip sheet that we have. Also, one of our -- we had three virtual interns. Thank the goodness. And one of our virtual interns just worked on a homeless tip sheet that's going to be released in the next couple of weeks. So we're going to give that to you as well.

Have some questions here about buying equipment. Again, that May webinar, and I can't remember the date. Can somebody find that webinar for me and put it in a chat? There was guidance provided verbally in the webinar. So there's a slide that asks the question, and we had our amazing policy lead, Evan Rosenberg and Sara Hastings answering those questions, and the answer is in there.

So please go back to that webinar. Listen to it. There is also a transcript as well that answers the questions regarding buying equipment for young people with WIOA funds.

So we have some additional questions. So for anybody who wants to jump in here, "So can anybody clarify that youth were paid? Were all the youth that you work with paid for their work experiences who did not work for an employer? Did you guys pay your young people for work experiences that were not connected to employer?" Can somebody jump in here and share that with us, please?

MS. PAYNE: Yes. Our youth get paid $11 an hour. Once their assignment is complete, that's considered done. We don't grade them A, B, C, D, nothing like that. It's complete or not complete. But yes. They are paid $11 an hour. And I will tell you --

MS. MEMINGER: What funding source are you using to pay? I guess the question is what funding source are you using to pay young people?

MS. PAYNE: WIOA.

MS. MEMINGER: OK. Anybody else want to jump in there?

MS. PAYNE: And I will say, I mean, it's really great. It's really given young single mothers an opportunity. Childcare's another barrier. I wanted to mention that now they can do this from home and do it all virtual. So --

MS. MEMINGER: OK. Thank you so much for that, Sally. Heather, Blythe, did you pay young people for their work experience when they were not connected to another outside employer?

MS. BRUNNER: We did. We did, and we used a traditional [inaudible]. So it also shows them how -- what they would do if they were actually going on the job. And our resources were TMS Youth and then WIOA youth were how we paid them out of the funding streams.

MS. MEMINGER: Blythe, to you as well?

MS. PIPKIN: Oh, that was Blythe. So we did not. All of our youth were -- yeah. All of our youth were at a work site connected to an employer. Now, we did provide stipends to our high school graduates. If they graduated high school, they got a stipend. If they successfully completed their work experience, they got a stipend. But as far as paying our youth, they were at a work site associated with an employer.

MS. MEMINGER: OK. Thank you. So you guys got some tips there and how much -- I think there's a question in a chat. People are sharing how much they're paying their young people per hour. So keep sharing that information in the chat.

We also have a question here. I think they should -- there's question about, "Could you share some ideas on how to draw in out-of-school youth for work experience?"

Now, question for you all. Did -- you guys did work with some out-of-school youth. For those who did, how did you get out-of-school youth involved in your program?

MS. PIPKIN: Well, we had --

MS. MEMINGER: Sally, you're nodding. I'm going to go to you first.

MS. PIPKIN: Who are you going to?

MS. MEMINGER: Sally.

MS. PIPKIN: OK.

MS. PAYNE: Oh, okay. Yeah. Well, just like -- just like everything else, I mean, really, it was -- outreach is key. So yes. We do have some out-of-school youth working in the virtual experience. And I would say the outreach is basically the same. And it was social media, social media, social media, and getting that information out there.

The TANF portion, we also run this virtual experience with some TANF dollars and WIOA youth dollars. They're a little bit different. TANF will only do a laptop loaning program where WIOA youth can be a purchase. And that's fine. It tends to be the TANF participants right now are a little bit younger than our WIOA youth. So -- but really, I mean, we're serving both. The outreach was basically the same for both.

MS. MEMINGER: Thank you. Heather, did you want to jump in here and share?

MS. PIPKIN: Yes. We partner well with our partners. Our youth are referred to us from the juvenile justice system, from the parole and probation offices, from Arkansas Rehab. A lot of our youth -- out-of-school youth are actually referred to us by other partners.

Now, we do have some that come in from word of mouth. You got Gwen in work experience, and they go and tell their friends. And if you tell one, they tell three and that three end up telling ten. So word of mouth is the largest recruitment effort that we have. But our partners was a huge success in this, especially with the parole and probation and the juvenile justice system.

MS. MEMINGER: Heather, I want to shout to you out right now because word of mouth, if I haven't learned anything else in this work with working with young people, is that your young people sell your program.

MS. PIPKIN: They do.

MS. MEMINGER: And so if you treat them right and they get the services that they need and they get connected to this amazing opportunity and caring adults, they will shout your program out from their lungs and the rooftops.

And so it's important that we utilize our young people. We ask them to link on their social media to the things that we're doing so we get more young people in, especially out-of-school youth who tend not -- may not have a home, a stable home environment, may not have a situation where they have a caring or guardian figure in their homes. And so social media is how they stay connected. And a lot of times using our young people as that mouthpiece for us is absolutely important.

Blythe, did you want to share working with out-of-school youth as well?

MS. BRUNNER: Most of our out-of-school youth we gear towards what Heather had said earlier about dealing with employers. The virtual program we ran, we found success with the in-school population.

MS. MEMINGER: Awesome. Awesome. Thank you.

OK. So I have a general question about virtual experiences. Were -- the virtual experiences that were -- that began, where they completed and how did you know they were completed, if it was a virtual project; right? Virtual experience, how do we know that the virtual experience was complete? Was there a product? Was there an output? Was there a service delivery? How do we know that?

Anybody? I'll start with you, Blythe. You're smiling? I'm going to let you jump in there.

MS. BRUNNER: So what we did is we would start with our youth in the morning and then we would do whatever topic it was and then they would come back after their activity and they would share it with everybody. So they would talk about this is what their note cards looked like that went to the post person.

We also did -- on the giving back, we did postcards for health care workers that were still working, that worked all through COVID-19. So we did it more as they proved to us what activity they did and with their coworkers. Well, their -- not coworkers, but their co-enrollees in the same system that we were in.

MS. MEMINGER: Awesome. Anybody else want to jump in here and share with -- how we know our virtual experience was complete?

MS. PAYNE: Well, our kids have to complete assignments. So they have to -- it's upon completion of the assignments, logging of their hours, and earning of their certificates. So that's how we're knowing -- we know that the work is getting done.

I will say we have a separate staff member, actually kind of the teacher, if you will, rather than their case managers. Case manager, they know them on a different level. Tend to be a little more, oh, it's okay. If you have somebody that's not case managing them, doesn't have that more personal connection, they're more likely to say, no. Assignment's not complete. Go back. Do it again. It needs to be complete.

So we kind of keep those two positions. They have a case manager, and then they have their Google Classroom teacher. But it's completion of the coursework, completion of the assignments, and earning up their certificates.

MS. MEMINGER: Thank you. All right. Anybody else? Heather, you want to jump in?

MS. PIPKIN: No.

MS. MEMINGER: OK. So a couple questions that I see coming up in the chat, and I want to bring them to our attention is there's questions about the rural communities; right? There's some input here about rural communities. And I know we have folks on here that work in -- with rural communities.

How was Wi-Fi provided in the rural community? And, again, paying for internet service, I just mentioned that about that tip sheet, that webinar we had in May of last year. Please watch that because there's some information on there and how that WIOA funds can be used to help, again, alleviate barriers to employment and education, if the young person is enrolled.

But how was internet delivered to the rural youth because of the technology divide, the digital divide that we suffer around the country but especially in our rural communities? Can you share with us that information? And I believe, Blythe, you're in the most rural, I think -- most rural part of our nation on this presentation.

MS. BRUNNER: Well, we actually started with our own employees when they went home because they're in their homes as well as our customers that we were serving. So it was trying to figure out how do we connect them to a internet provider that could provide to their areas.

If internet wasn't available, because some of the youth were just coming in as we were getting ready to get started, that we looked at any of those options could -- did they have a friend who was in the program? Was there a relative that they could go to their house to possibly get on?

I did want to make mention that I didn't earlier was that, by having the virtual program, we had a lot of parents who actually started to see what was going on in the program. Then they actually started to come on board with some of them and be engaged as well?

So for us, we are learning with COVID-19. Earlier somebody had said, if -- one of the things that we're benefiting from COVID-19 is having more accessible internet in our six-county region, as well as having it in the parking lots and available to more people that may not have had it before.

MS. MEMINGER: Thank you for sharing that. I know some of our other colleagues on the panel are in rural, semirural areas. I'm going to jump in something.

Again, there's a lot of questions going on about stipends and wages. And I know -- I'm going to ask this question at the end of the webinar, but if you guys want some clarification on that or some extra technical assistance, we will be working on that because I see a lot of back and forth about stipends and wages, and we want to make sure that we're clear on those questions.

So keep those questions coming around stipends and wages. If you have outstanding questions, what we're going to do as a team is go back to the drawing board and make sure that we have either a webinar or a webcast or something soon because you guys have lots of questions about stipends and wages.

This is not the topic of this particular webinar, but we want to hear your questions to help us best prepare a webinar for you guys. And we can probably get that done, and my boss is on the line. Let's see what she says. Probably get that done in the next four to six weeks.

So just keep those questions coming. I'm not trying to avoid the stipends and wages questions. I just want to make sure that we, as our team in the national office, get together, prepare that webinar properly, and get that information to you guys. But you guys have a lot of questions about that. I just wanted to make sure that we are clear to keep them coming, but we won't be answering those today.

Heather, Sally, do you want to jump in here about the rural communities, if you guys wanted to share how to get the internet access and resources to the rural areas of your counties?

MS. PIPKIN: Yes. Eastern is also a rural area. And we did modify our supportive services and add technology and internet access and all of that. But after doing the research to determine the need, most of all cell phone providers gave everyone unlimited internet access through their cell phone during COVID.

And after we researched that and realized that, and then, as you stated earlier, all the schools and the restaurants and everyone was providing free Wi-Fi. So the internet access really wasn't a huge issue with us here in Eastern for the main fact that all cell phone providers provided unlimited internet access during all of this.

MS. MEMINGER: So they were on board. They were on board. That's the best thing I'm hearing because some places struggled, but it appears that people jumped in and really took ownership of the situation that we were in and shared their resources, which is absolutely amazing.

And, Sally, did you want to jump in on this part of the rural community? Are you confirming with the rest of our panel?

MS. PAYNE: Yeah. I would just concur with my colleagues. And if it was an issue, we would provide hotspots for the kids. [inaudible].

MS. MEMINGER: Awesome. OK. Awesome. So I'm going to get to our next question, but I have some questions in a chat that I thought was important.

We are -- and I don't think it's a question on my panel list. So I'm going to ask it anyway. I'm going to jump in here and ask this question for you guys.

We're going back to, quote, unquote, semi normal, whatever that is, depending on your state, depending on your county, depending on your city. And as we move possibly into a hybrid model, which again, ladies and gentlemen, we talked about that briefly. It's maybe a part of the day for the young person is online. The other part, they're probably doing a physical activity around the work, maybe meeting in a small group outside, but they're spending part-time in work and part-time -- excuse me. Part-time in face-to-face work and part-time in a virtual work or fully virtual or fully face to face.

And one of the questions that's being asked is, "How can we discuss best practices of reengaging those employers we may have lost in 2020 because now we're coming back or keeping the partner that we really had still engaged 2020 to 2021?"

And I'm going to go through the panel one more time just to see what are your thoughts about reengaging or keeping, strengthening that employer partnership with our employers.

So, Blythe, I'm going to go to you. Did you lose any employer partners between 2019 and 2020? Did you strengthen employer partners? I mean, talk to us about your employer partner and engagement.

MS. BRUNNER: I would say in our north central region, we did not lose our employers or organizations that were work sites. It's actually strengthened them when we came back to work because everybody realized how much of an impact our youth did for those employers and those work sites.

So I think it was a win-win when we came back. We were excited to engage with the employers and agencies and partners, as well as they were ready to start opening their doors.

Probably the hardest thing was the employers. Of course, the first priority of those employers were getting their full-time people back to work. But once they got that going, then they were opening their doors to allow us to come back in with our work experience opportunities.

And one of the strengths that we have is we try and place our work experience opportunity, especially for our out-of-school youth, with a company that is interested in hiring, so that when -- that gives them a chance to show that they have the soft skills to show up every day. They're showing up on time. We all know that work experience is a training component where, if somebody doesn't show up on time, we need to be intervening with them.

I did put in the chat that we use a progress report that the work experience site fills out on a bi-weekly when we collect their time card so that we can make sure that, if there are issues, that we're taking care of those. And we have found that it's been a win-win. We've been able to actually move our -- some of our customers from a WIOA work experience into a WIOA on-the-job training activity. So I wanted to share that. I think it's been a strength in our area.

MS. MEMINGER: Awesome. Thank you for sharing that, Blythe. Heather, you want to jump in here and share about your employer and partner engagement? Did you lose any employer partners? Are you looking to strengthen, reengage? Can you share with us what you guys are doing?

MS. PIPKIN: We haven't lost any. Some, like our child care providers and employers like that have slowed down, but we haven't lost them. We're still engaged with them. And when they're -- they're slowly reopening, and we are still able to use those.

As far as engaging new ones, we engage new employers every day. We try -- our participants are matched to the work site by their ISF. Now, if someone wants to be a nurse, we're not going to put them somewhere cleaning up the street. So the more work sites we have, the better we're able to assist our clients. So we have our new ones. We continue to engage -- or we have our old ones. We continue to engage with new ones. And it's something that we make a normal practice of to do on a day-to-day basis. That way we continue to have work sites for our customers.

MS. MEMINGER: Awesome. Thank you so much. And, Sally, you want to round us out in this question?

MS. PAYNE: Sure. Yeah. I don't know that I would necessarily say we lost them. I think maybe temporarily have been put on hold as they are bringing back their full-time. Our youth aren't ready for them, and I don't know if they're ready for our youth.

However, we have a really low unemployment rate, especially in the Springfield area or the Greene County area. It's like 3.2. It's low and there are employers desperate for people.

What we're hoping to do with this virtual program is maybe scale it down. Doesn't have to be full-time going forward necessarily, but some sort of hybrid model because it's about being prepared. And I think it will help matching that youth with a particular employer that they're -- where they're interested in; right?

So I think that will help strengthen the employer engagement to know that the youth maybe are a little more prepared because they've been through this course. We can show them the completion, their certificate. We're hoping to leverage that with employers going forward.

Yeah. So I don't think we've lost any. I just think everything's still on pause a little bit. I think we're going to go through a slow crawl to recovery in 2021, probably some areas faster than others. But what 2020 has done, I think everybody, we have shown ourselves how we can bend and flex and move in and be what the economy needs us to be; right? And as public workforce professionals, that's what we need to do.

MS. MEMINGER: Absolutely, Sally. And I'm going to come back.

There's a couple questions about virtual supervision. I know one of you answered that question by saying you didn't need a supervise because we knew people were in a learning -- so I'm going to ask that question the next slide in the second.

You all have already answered this question about technology; right? Is there anything additional about technology and the virtual experience that you would like to share with us that you have not covered yet? I think you have all talked a lot about internet access and computer access and grab bags of goodies.

Is there anything in addition that you -- either -- any of you want to add to the technology, any tips or tools to the technology piece? And I hear nodding. So I'm going to jump on whoever's nodding. I think, Blythe, you're nodding. And if there's anything extra you want to add? No? Sally? OK.

MS. PAYNE: I feel like we've covered it.

MS. MEMINGER: Yeah. We did. So I'm going to stop here and actually ask about supervision. And there's several questions about, how do you supervise a young person who is in a work experience virtually?

And I believe, if I'm not mistaken, Sally, you talked about some type of time sheet, check in. Does anybody want to jump in here and really give us an example of how you supervise a young person in a virtual work experience to make sure they're on time and all that good stuff?

MS. PAYNE: Yeah. I mean, I had mentioned previously it's about completion of the assignments, watching those assignments, ensuring that they're completed, logging their hours, earning their certificates, and I think separating the case manager from the Google Classroom teacher is very helpful. So that kind of helps the kid be a little more accountable, I think.

Of course, we proctor all the assessments. So even if they're online, we proctor all those. So we watch them. Had one young lady forget her camera was on, laid down and went to sleep. And it's just part of the process and part of working with youth.

So yeah. Having that separation between the case manager and the Google Classroom teacher is very helpful to kind of keep them in line. But it's all about the completion of everything. And if they don't get them in, they don't get paid.

MS. MEMINGER: OK. Cool. So basically, the products -- you get paid based upon the production and the completion.

MS. PAYNE: Yeah.

MS. MEMINGER: I think, Sally, I believe it was you -- and correct me if I'm wrong. There was a template you talked about, a bi-weekly report. Was that you?

MS. PAYNE: No.

MS. MEMINGER: That was you, Blythe?

MS. BRUNNER: That was -- yes.

MS. MEMINGER: OK. Blythe, is that something that you're willing to share because folks are asking for it?

MS. BRUNNER: Yeah. I can share our bi-weekly progress report that we use. We use that with actual work experience -- true -- what I would call true work experience between the customer and the employer -- jobseeker and the employer.

But I wanted to just make mention that we did use -- there's a couple of comments. I did respond about how we used a traditional work experience without having the employer involved.

And what we did is our board was very instrumental in Pennsylvania when we realized that we were going to have trouble investing our TANF youth dollars knowing that we weren't opening up by July 1st. So we actually met with our board and came up with our 15-day core plan.

Our board was instrumental in getting that to the state of Pennsylvania for our TANF youth dollars for June -- our program in June of 2020. So I just want to share that because we didn't just decide that we were going to offer a virtual program, because that's not what our initial plan that we submitted through our board had. So I did want to share that.

And we use just regular time sheets for our work experiences, but I will share that progress report. So can I get that to you guys, and then that will be posted where --

MS. MEMINGER: Absolutely. We'll put it where -- with the recording of the webinar. Absolutely. Thank you for that, for sharing that. And we will -- and make sure you put draft on it or scan, whatever you want to, and we'll get that up as part of the tools and resources.

Heather, did you --

MS. PIPKIN: You can have it. You can have it. I'm that person. If somebody already built it, take it. Put your name on it.

MS. MEMINGER: OK. Well, thank you for sharing. Heather, before I get to you really quickly, there's a question about registered apprenticeship in this chat, and they're questions I wanted to touch base on before I get to you.

We at the Division of Youth Services, worked with the Office of Apprenticeship to put together a collaboration document. And I don't know if one of my team members can get their fingers to find it, but we actually did a collaboration document with OA, Office of Apprenticeship, to talk about collaboration opportunities with young people and -- oh, and as you guys all know, this current administration has a huge apprenticeship push.

You will be seeing more information about apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship opportunities for our young people as we in this country try to make sure that we offer apprenticeship as a viable source and pathway for young people. So keep your eyes open for that.

But if anybody can find that link for me on the collaboration document, that would be really great to share in the chat. And if not, I can try to find it myself, but me moderating and trying to find links right now is hard. Will you share with us how did you supervise your young people who are in our experience?

MS. PIPKIN: So our work experience for participants continued to be at their work site. So their supervisors -- the work site supervisors were there to supervise them. Yeah.

MS. MEMINGER: Awesome. Thank you. And, Sarah, thank you for sharing that collaboration document. We appreciate you for sharing that and attending. That's my boss, ladies and gentlemen. So she's doing her due diligence. I appreciate it.

Let's wrap -- what are your plans for summer 2021? I'll start again with you, Heather, because you're the first face I see. What's your plan? Are you taking any innovative practices from 2020 into 2021? What is your plan?

MS. PIPKIN: Yes. We are. We're hoping 2021 gets back to more of a norm. But with the technology and the Zoom meetings and the Teams meetings that we're able to have with our participants, that can provide -- that takes out a lot of them having to find child care, them having to find transportation.

So we're wanting to keep those kind of things in a bag to limit the childcare and the transportation issue. But we're also wanting to stay on course with -- because I don't know about you, but I learn more face to face. So we're also want to stay on track with keeping our participants in their work site as well. So --

MS. MEMINGER: Awesome. Thank you, Heather, for that. Sally, I'm going to jump to you. What's happening in 2021? Are you taking any innovative practices from 2020? Share with us what your plans are.

MS. PAYNE: Yeah. Well, first of all, I just hope we can stay open. That's my goal. But yes. I want to keep it. I want to keep this virtual experience. It's been such a great opportunity. It's so great to give the kids so many options. We've just been able to reach youth that we've never been able to serve before, that never stepped foot in a job center before.

We want to go back to traditional, of course. I think that's so important to get them out there on the job. But we also want to at least get them some sort of work preparedness virtual course before to get them prepared. Whether that's for remote work with an employer or a traditional in-person work, they -- I just think it's key they have some sort of work preparedness.

And I really would love to see it statewide. I mean, we had so many applicants from -- we have 14 board regions in the state of Missouri, and we were seeing them from all over the state. So the need is there. The demand is there. We know it is. We in our region can't serve everybody. We did get permission from some other regions and went through the process to move them and serve them, but we couldn't do it for everybody. So the need is there. The demand is there. And I just hope we can kind of recover along with the economy.

MS. MEMINGER: That sounds like a plan, and I think that's great that we're going to take some of the stuff from last year, put it in this year, and you're really emphasizing the work -- the virtual accessibility; right? Making that a part of how we deliver services, because, just like we talk about high school and alternative high school, everybody does not learn the same and everybody does not work the same.

Some people do better. I'm learning about my son who loves to socialize, but he's doing better academically at home. Who knew; right? So some people can work from home, and it works for them because of child care, taking care of elderly parents, transportation issues. And some young people want to go in. But depending on where we are with the COVID restrictions, that may not be able to happen.

So I thank you for pushing for keeping some of these benefits that came out of the restriction of COVID.

So there's a question in the chat about I believe it's on-the-job training, OJT, because we call it OJT. If I'm wrong, please correct me. But there are some questions about getting on-the-job training.

Can you do that virtually? If you did it virtually, share what you guys did because a lot of folks believe that on-the-job training has to be face to face. So can we share? I think, Sally, you just talked to this; right? Some type of certificate. Can you share a little more about that on-the-job training you were giving virtually?

MS. PAYNE: Yeah. I mean, they earned eight certificates or they do going through, but this is part of preparing them for that. I think that's our hope as we go into 2021 is to do some virtual on-the-job training, to do some virtual remote work for an employer, but they have to learn how to do it.

That's what our virtual work preparedness online Ozarks Academy is hopefully doing for those youth, get them prepared for that kind of work. It's a new -- it's a new day. It's a new way of doing business. It's a new way of, like you said, learning. Some do better than others. We already see in our academy there's some really high fliers that get their assignments in really, really early. And then there's some stragglers. I mean, but that's the way it is in school right now as well; right?

So yeah. Our hope is to move to some sort of virtual OJT as well. But whether that's traditional or like an academy, either one.

MS. MEMINGER: Thank you so much, Sally.

Heather, do you want to share any on-the-job training opportunities that you may be using?

MS. PIPKIN: Right now, we are focused on work experience. We haven't done any on-the-job training. We find that the work experience works just as well as getting the participants hired on. So that's what we're doing right now.

MS. MEMINGER: Thank you so much for that, and I agree with you, too.

Blythe, anything you want to share about on-the-job training virtually or in person that you may be doing or --

MS. BRUNNER: All of our on-the-job trainings are hands on with the employer. We haven't done any virtual in that respect. But what we find with -- I know I had mentioned earlier our work experiences. A lot of times our work experience will be for a very general job, and they're proving they can show up on time, that they can get a task done.

Where we move into on-the-job training could be a more skilled position in the company. So I just wanted to stress that we don't use the work experience and then move them into the same position, into on-the-job training. In order for it to be an on-the-job training opportunity, there would have to be additional skills or skills that they didn't learn while they were on their work experience.

MS. MEMINGER: Thank you for sharing. There's a question about ESL learners and on-the-job training. Based upon our vast mosaic in our country, we have ESL learners all over different languages, from French to Arabic to Spanish.

Did any of you guys deal with or have to provide certain provisions to engage our ESL youth? And you can just jump in because I don't know who has or who hasn't. Anybody want to jump in here with the ESL learners?

No? So I'm going to ask the open chat. If you have worked with ESL learners and you've arrived at on-the-job training, please put your suggestions for help in the chat so folks can get some resources from you as well.

I'm going to be -- I want to share with you guys in this slide -- Google Translate. Thank you so much for sharing that.

So we want to hear achievement and best practices, and one way we're going to ask our -- we lost Sally for a second there. We're going to ask our panelists to wrap this up. But what we want to make sure is, if you all have any outstanding questions for us, any best practices, any challenges, you can always reach the Division of Youth Services through our email address. We have it right there. It's Youth.services@dol.gov.

An actual human who happens to be me and my colleague, we man that email -- that mailbox. So you will actually get in contact with a human being who will actually try to get you an answer?

So we love to hear from you guys. We are looking to highlight best practices. We're looking to provide tip sheets. We're looking to learn from you all. We do webcasts. We have done summer series webcasts where we've interviewed workforce programs and did a five-minute interview. And we have those available on WorkforceGPS as well.

So we will reach -- we like to have that communication with you guys, but we're going to ask -- I know Sally just jumped back in. If you can take away one thing that was an achievement or best practice over the last year -- I'm going to challenge you to only pick one -- Heather, what would that be?

MS. PIPKIN: Our achievement would be that we were still able to serve and provide services to as many, if not more participants that needed it during the pandemic as we did prior to the pandemic. We did not let the pandemic stop us. We kept providing services, and we just kept letting it go out there. We never let it stop us. And to me, that is an achievement on Arkansas.

MS. MEMINGER: Awesome. Awesome. Sally, your one achievement or best practice you want to share?

MS. PAYNE: OK. That's really hard for one. So I'll concur with Heather. How about that? And then I'll add one. That way I kind of have two on the fly. But I do concur with Heather, of course.

But what was interesting for us in this state is that we have actually strengthened our partnership with our state agency and our regional DOL office. When we were thinking about doing this, of course, we needed to ask. We needed to put it out there. And when you're thinking of innovative things to do, sometimes you're afraid to ask. Is it too out there? Is it going to be allowable, acceptable, appropriate? And I'm always like, don't be afraid to ask.

So our state agency, Dr. Mardy Leathers, Rory Harris from region five, I mean, so supportive, and it's really kind of -- we're looking at it as more of a partnership rather than, well, they're a funding authority and agency that gives our guidance, policies, and rules.

And it makes you think about things different. And I think 2020 has forced all of us to think outside the box and be innovative. It just has. But really having a good connection with your state agency and your DOL office I think is key to innovation. You just never know where the good little spark of a good idea is going to come from.

MS. MEMINGER: Absolutely. Absolutely. Thank you so much.

And I'm going to wrap it up with Blythe. What's your one achievement, best practice you're going to take with us in 2021?

MS. BRUNNER: It's our partnerships, our relationships with our partners, our board, our employers, and our agencies.

MS. MEMINGER: Awesome. That means you -- see. This is what I'm saying about partnership. This means you had a great partnership before 2020; right?

MS. BRUNNER: Right.

MS. MEMINGER: You were able to sustain that partnership during the craziest time in our country; right? And now we're coming out of it, the partnership is still good and there, and that is amazing. So partnership building -- and I want to hear from people in the chat.

Now, the vision of youth services is we always share employer partnership and employer engagement practices. Would you guys like to hear more about how to best engage employer partners? Put yes. Maisha, we want to hear some more about engaging employer partners, because -- yes. OK. We have some folks. We'll get some stuff together to you guys.

MS. PAYNE: Oh, my gosh.

MS. MEMINGER: There's a lot of yeses in here. Sarah, do you see these yeses? OK. So important, and I think the topic really is not just engaging employers but engaging employers and keeping partners during this pandemic; right? So I think that's -- it's a little bit farther than just getting people to the table; right, working with your workforce board?

I always like to encourage people to do open houses. That's one of my favorite tips I give folks. If you have a great youth program, invite employers to come see what you're doing and also have an exchange. I call it a peer exchange, externship. Have some of your case managers, your directors go to the work site and see what they're doing, take some kids with you and do some job shadowing.

So there's -- there has to be a give and take. And so, yes. Definitely, we want to talk about employer partners. And I hear, Cortina, about the rural area. We always are going to want to make sure that we always support the rural community because there's a little bit of different challenges over distance and making sure we talk about employer partners, which may be virtual now, now that we have the opportunity.

I've been told to share with you guys there's some great resource in the weblink section and in the file share section at the bottom of your screen. So, folks, if you want to click on some of these resources that we keep pinning and pinpointing, click there. My team is putting stuff in there instead of in the chat where it keeps coming up.

And thank you, Michelle. I try to moderate to the best of my ability. You know I try, you all. I try.

So any -- so we're not going to take any more questions. We have three minutes. What we want to do is hear any final questions from the chat group. Just throw it in the chat. We're going to work on it.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my dear colleagues Sally, Blythe, and Heather for your amazing time. Jon, you could take us off. Thank you, guys. I just want to say thank you. Thank you for sharing your expertise. Thank you for sharing your experience. Thank you for sharing our rules, challenges, and solutions. And I'm just so, so, so happy to have you here.

Jon, can I get the full screen off camera and the full screen of this last slide here?

Colleagues, what I would like to -- I'm going to turn off my camera. I think I can do that. Can I turn [inaudible]? Yeah.

So what I want to share with you guys is these are some resources that we've highlighted today. These are more of our virtual engagement resources and some -- and, again, you had the PowerPoint in the file share.

We have on here some tools and tips that we learned over the last year about engaging young people in virtual spaces. We also have the summer 2020 webcast. We interviewed Lexington, Kentucky, Chicago, Illinois and Franklin Hampshire, Massachusetts. And there's about five- to eight-minute interviews with them.

So these are some great tips and tools. I want to hear right now, is there anything in the chat that you guys are missing from your technical assistance chest that you need help with? I would like to hear from you guys, because what we do with that information is we take it back to the drawing board, and we actually work our hardest to meet your technical assistance needs.

So, please, if there's anything that you think that you're missing from your arsenal for serving young people in the workforce system, any clar- -- and I know -- I already know wages and stipends. We got that. Number one.

So please share with us how we can best be of service to you all out there in the field. A lot of times we've already produced the product, but a lot of people are new and they don't know where to find it. We are happy to direct you to those resources. Some resources we're lacking in, and we want to make sure that we get it to you.

So please, this is your time. Let us know what additional work at the U.S. Department of Labor, Division of Youth Services we need to be doing. And we appreciate you sharing that with us.

Work readiness curriculum. Thank you so, so, so, so much, Lacy (sp), for there. We're going to get on that. Add it to the chat. Here is Heather -- I'm going to leave this slide up for a little bit.

Here is Heather, Sally, and Blythe's information, if you guys wanted to know how to contact them. If you have any outstanding questions, we want to make sure that you guys get with them and just let us know that you've contacted them.

And thank you, guys, for your compliments. We are here to serve and be on the lookout at WorkforceGPS. We have some amazing webinars coming up, and we are so excited to be a part of the solution. And have a fabulous, fabulous 2021 summer. Thank you.

Jon, to you.

(END)