

Please stand by for realtime captions. [Captioner waiting for correct number to connect audio for Mass.

Commission for the Blind. If there has been a change, please contact 800-590-4197 or cc@captionedtext.com]

This is Camilla . Let's start. Good morning and good afternoon to everyone that has joined us today. We are so sorry for the technical difficulties, and if you are having any difficulties , ask questions in the comment boxes so that we can take care of that.

I am Brind'Amour, the senior program specialist for the Institute for community inclusion at Boston. We have [Indiscernible] to field questions that you have, and to remind you that if you are requesting CRC credit, you must complete the evaluation at the end of the webinar. Other individuals can also complete the evaluation.

We have a two guess from the Massachusetts commission for the blind [Name indiscernible]. They have done an unbelievable job from a concept, pilot program an all-out mentoring program at mass blind , and they have proven the benefit to the mentoring for the successful employment outcome. I believe you will be excited when listening to this webinar, and please ask any questions. I will turn it over to [Indiscernible].

Good morning everybody. I will talk a little bit first to get into the mentoring program was first developed for the mass Commission for the Blind here in mass to sit -

Massachusetts. Next slide. We are lucky enough to be an individual stand-alone agency and we have not been incorporated in a general agent see which we find to be beneficial for the consumers. We are committed to providing high quality individualized services and making sure that there is community integration, promoting full access to community services and resources, and tailoring to meet the unique needs of our individuals. We will go through this first part a little bit quickly due to our time constraints. We have many services here at the commission. The mentoring program is through the vocational rehabilitation program. That is obviously geared toward employment and besides the vocational rehabilitation, social rehabilitation, children's services, [Indiscernible] and mostly individuals that are both deaf, blind and may have a significant secondary disability. We provide orientation, teaching, and we have a mentoring program, and assistive technology program which we are lucky to have. Obviously, our transition service. We have an internship program which is a national model that has received many awards, and we are on our 12th year and just closed at the Statehouse with 95 interns, and for a small agency that is really wonderful. We have a youth Council job club [Indiscernible] patient day, training, [Indiscernible] mentoring program and that is just a few of the exhausted list. As we know, currently 70% of an unemployment rate nationally, and it may be a little bit higher for individuals that are blind and visually impaired. There is no perfect assistance available pertaining to [Indiscernible]. Basically, that is because it is very hard to [Inaudible - static] because what they

do is they take century disabilities and they look at not only people that are blind and visually impaired and legally blind, but also look at people with low vision that may not be legally blind. They look at people that are deaf, hard of hearing, and people with some vision loss. It is hard to get an accurate number for employment statistics and many other statistics about this group. I want to mention that and keep in mind with some of these percentages and research. The lack of the research about the topic, it is very hard with the mentor program population documenting outcome. It is a unique program. We have found some examples of outcomes to be improved motivation and self-esteem, increase interest in continuing education, increased interest in having a job, career and knowledge on how to attain that. Increased interest in the community and extra curricular activity. And cute advocacy skills, and more visibility to help the relationships in general. Seeing these studies again, due to the relatively known programs that exist, we really need to do more work on this. The national mentor project is only 13% of research survey usage disabilities while one in five individuals has a disability. This mentoring program, and in a minute I will talk about who the mentors are and it is a unique concept in how we match and who they are. This started with - we wanted it to be innovative, and we wanted to come up with as many programs as we can, so I will pass this to Camilla and she will do some more sites for you.

This is Camilla, and this mentoring program really started with an idea with Brian from leadership and all across the

agency. I would say that our leadership and agency emphasis on innovation, innovative practices and ways to engage with the community and to support the consumers that are legally blind toward independent living, employment, outcome and etc. outcome and etc. I was a part of the Commonwealth sponsored development program, and that is where I worked with a project mentor to pilot a mentoring program in this specific region in the MetroWest region of Massachusetts. We started off with 13 participants, in the mentoring program. >> I hear folks speaking.

We started out with a piloting program in a specific region. [Indiscernible - multiple speakers] >> With the support of the Institute of community inclusion and the specific branch about vocation rehabilitation management, and with the support of the grant we were able to advance in pilot is mentoring program statewide, and it was thanks to the professional state development program and the leadership at the agency, and the support of this grant that we were able to fund and put an emphasis on starting this type of program which was identified by the staff and consumers as something that would be beneficial. They thought it would be beneficial for the consumers to engage in mentoring and [Indiscernible - multiple speakers]. In the beginning we had a VR staff workgroup in which staff across agency in state come together and talk about what would be beneficial for the mentoring program, what with the measurement be, what would be the successful outcome be, and we developed a request to response - to partner

with the vendor, and we have some staff for the vendor agency partner for use in this room, and we are pleased to be working with partners for disabilities, and nonprofit organizations that are based in Boston and Massachusetts that have a presence nationwide. The overall goal of the mentoring program is to engage in the vocational rehabilitation consumers, particularly work with professional mentors that are also legally blind in a meaningful relationship to maximize employment outcome. We had these four goals listed on the slides, but the overall goal is employment and employment outcome. Number two, the other goal is to strengthen the partnership with organizations in the community through cooperation for sustaining the positive mental relationship and improving outcome. Number three, our goal in terms of the program was to develop policies and procedures for sustainable program and sustainability. That is a very important issue and topic that we have been looking at here, the agency and working with the vendor in terms of how to sustain the program effective and meaningful and events during the year to support the positive mentoring relationships and to support essentially the mentees in the professional development. The mentees are our consumers that are transitioning. In the planning phase of the program, first we started with evaluating the pilot program that had 13 event and it was specifically piloted in one region, and we got feedback. And we spoke with the staff and consumers so that we could develop a meaningful statewide program. We determine what type of outcome we wanted to track and measure. Of course, the employment outcome, but since we are mainly

matching the mentees that are transitioning that our students, we may not see some of the employment outcomes for many years to come, but we identified other items to measure and track, such as the mentees engaging in job shadowing opportunities, and measuring through surveys their self-esteem and whether that has been affected or influenced and increased. And we have gathered more information about the specific career that they are interested in. In the beginning, we formed an advisory committee that was helpful for the agency to have this input from the staff, and also to have staff speak with the consumers so that we could gather information about what would make this program meaningful and effective. We also had an agencywide contest to really engage the staff and spread awareness and to essentially elect and select a title and name for the mentoring program. And so we linked about expertise in working for success. ICI was extremely helpful in terms of technical assistance, and helping us to analyze different research about best practices. I would also say that the IQ - [Inaudible - static] . In the planning stage and throughout we have reviewed and revised the program materials so that they are structured to the program, and that was something we realized from the onset was necessary and the pilot program. We were told to have a structure with a manual application process, frequently asked questions and various documents that were important.

We have community-based mentoring, E mentoring, group mentoring, as components of the program. Community-based meaning that they meet in various

locations, locations in the community, face-to-face meetings. This is the best form of mentoring we have found and beneficial for the mentees and the mentors to sustain a positive relationship. We have been mentoring, also a method that is built into the program where some of the mentors and mentees may be maxed across the state or may select to engage only in the mentoring, and for various regions, - reasons, because of their geographic location and this may be the best way they can engage in the mentoring relationship. And thanks to UMB, this is been helpful as an option to utilize the portal that was created to communicate with one another and to access various resources, and there are jobs posted on their as well. Exclusive to the portal that are mentoring to the program, and then of course, berries statewide evincing year-round. We have the group mentoring component where the individuals can meet one another. These are the various components in terms of what participants commit to. They commit to a one-year mentoring relationship, maintaining contact with the mentor and mentee at least biweekly, so every two weeks. Also meeting in person at least live times a year. If they are engaged in a community-based mentoring relationship, and not exclusive of E mentoring, that would be applicable to them. And we also strongly encourage mentors, if possible, to provide a job shadowing experience for them . That is helpful to expose the mentee to the world of work. As I mentioned, we have your long events, and orientation beginning at the beginning of the program and the orientation was in January of this year. We have mentor training, and this is

extremely helpful to train the mentors to help them with the program and equip them with the tools to be successful and to support the mentee. We also have various workshops throughout the [Inaudible - static] [BREAKING UP] and we have worked with our vendor to outline a specific calendar within our various regional offices within the various events to put these events together. I will now handed over to Aaron - Erin and she can talk about eligibility and recruitment. >> And we mentioned who are the mentees? Those are the individuals that are consumers that are 18 years of age at UMB and that are either preemployment our work ready, and they are actually doing a particular vocational [Indiscernible] or transitioning to a new field. The mentors are all gainfully employed or reasonably retired individuals that are legally blind. I will mention what legally blind in Massachusetts is . It is a visual of 2200 or less with correction or at field loss of 10 degrees or more. There are other people with low vision, but they do not consider them legally blind [Indiscernible] . All mentors are registered and have worked or are retired and have a lot to give. [Inaudible - static] as well as myself and the program coordinators are the main people that are [Inaudible - static] . I've been here for 17 years, and or gently I know a lot of the consumers and I can think of people that I have worked with in the past, and from different regions that I've been in that are young or older that are just reentering the workforce, and we have both populations. We have those that transition from 14 to 21, and we help those that are gone blind later in life, and those that are looking for new types

of employment and need guidance to the networking, job shadowing, advocacy and adjustments. That is a big part of that are the individuals that are more seasoned. In the screening process, the [Indiscernible] feedback is very important, vocational feedback is very important, mostly on the mentee side. I check in on the mentors, but I want the mentees to be comfortable talking to the counselors, which most of them are more comfortable talking to them and they know them. They have a relationship with them, and they talk often. Some of them may not know me and may not feel comfortable sharing something with me. We have three questions and it is very basic. [Inaudible - static] there is a tremendous amount of paperwork. I tried to keep it very simple as a check in with three questions to see how things are going. They may open up to the VR counselor more than that would to me. Or if they are prompted to respond, they make it more information, and the turnout has been pretty well so far. They attend the meeting six-month, and I asked for them to talk to me right away with any concerns that may come up. Even if it is once every two or three months that is fine. I also get phone calls. That is one way that we have tried to incorporate for the VR staff. In the screening process, the mentors fill out an application, they have an interview with the program manager, a background check is done, and they are aware of that. We get their license, signature and we have a good turnaround rate. We are in the process of getting those completed. The mentee also gets an application, interview and resume. We also have to recommend them to a mentor. And we know that if the mentee is not [

Inaudible - static] . I tried to make sure that I'm at the first meeting, if I do not already know people or they are not already connected. I want to see the relationship, and how it goes so that I can see that it will be a good match. The importance of the match is integral to the program's success, and finding out from the counselor information that I may not know and hear about. And there was an instance where somebody had a job and they got fired, or someone was a mentor and they work there, and it can make a huge difference in the match and training, [Inaudible - static] coordinator, we discussed [Indiscernible] and we keep updates every meeting. The matching that I just spoke about is a meaning for - meaningful match, it is based on various items, like what vocation they're going into, the character and value . It might be somebody that has a background of having to meet with women within their culture, meeting with a man alone is not something that is done. To keep those characters and values and those things that are important to them as a person, and as a culture . Also the geographic location. We have three different worthy mentor and mentees that meet statewide, and that is that the Springfield office, or surrounding areas. And there is an is - [Indiscernible] and Boston. New Bedford is still included in that, and the Northeast, Southeast, everybody can be involved. It is just a matter of does the mentor travel, and the mentee to be able to travel to me. Yet the keep that in mind when you are crossing regions. It can be a challenge. It does work. If you are on the list as a mentor or mentee, you can still go to the events, and you are still invited even if you are not matched, and

you can get a lot out of meeting with individual, and reviewing the struggles and successes. There will be a short waiting list due to the number of mentors and mentees that we have recruited. We want to make sure this is manageable. We are at that point at about now. They keep mentoring areas are networking, and this is the job search, strengths and weaknesses to be considered, help develop resumes, work on disclosure, professional presentation, 's Grill's and - skills and follow principles and organizational skills. Event workshops are developed through an event calendar through the three different office that I mentioned. Statewide partners for disabilities and they had been a big part of this success of this program. I want to thank Addy McIntyre, Kristin Humphrey, and Jenelle, and we meet biweekly in it is been wonderful. They do all types of topics, whether an interest in a community-based event, or E mentoring . I'm sorry, the webinar that they sponsor. Jobs or skills, professional communication, financial literacy, self advocacy, stress management, recreation, teambuilding, and webinars that are provided. They have a very strong attendance. As you can imagine, one of the challenges working with the mentors and mentees that are legally blind can be transportation . We are working on that to make sure that we can assist and that area more. It can be difficult. But the webinars have been - everything is been great and attendance of the webinars is been up more. And a couple of testimonies of feedback that I've received, one said that they found it beneficial because they are able to interact with others with similar experiences. Many mentors find it easy to engage with

the mentees after attending a workshop. Mentees are able to use what they learn and the workshops. Those are some of the feedback on the surveys that UMB has been sending out. The events of been burying and topics that are beneficial to the mentors and mentees alike. I will pass it over to Camilla again.

This is Camilla. In terms of the thing and topic of the sustainability that I mentors - referenced earlier, that is important to any programs, and especially this program. This mentee program started off as a pilot in one region, and then with the support of ITI, grants and leadership, we will able to expand statewide and be piloted statewide. In terms of monitoring the relationship and monitoring the program, that is something we've been looking closely at, and working in partnership with the UMB and the national and center for mentoring to make sure that we can sustain the program into the next year and monitoring its effectiveness as well. To mention something that errant alluded to, I started as a mentoring coordinator in addition to my role as employment specialist with agency, and I have transition to a new role at the agency a couple of months ago. And Erin stepped in and she is mainly the one that is checking in with the mentors. Erin is the program coordinator, as I mentioned, that is the one that is checking in with the mentors, and serving as their single point of contact. We have been working on engaging the staff more because that is the feedback that we received, and questions from the mentors in terms of how to we utilize the VR counselor, and we had to go back and

speaking with the ER staff - VR staff in terms of their workload and how the consumers have access to the mentors, and that was very helpful to the VR counselor and the work they are doing with the consumers. Erin has implemented some ways for the VR staff to check in with the mentees, and that is the DR consumer - VR consumer, and Erin is receiving the information from the VR staff, and a great way for the VR staff to check in with consumers and see what is going on. Also in terms of monitoring and engaging with the vendor with the national center and you - UMB and to check in and really monitor and assess along the way how things are going and ensure that any sort of concerns or questions, or feedback is being used and implemented as appropriate. Surveys are a great way that we have found together feedback, gauge how things are moving along, and the ideas that the vendors have been implementing, and we've also developed and implemented some surveys to gather information from the mentors and mentees which we're still gathering those surveys at this time from the midterms after six months of how things are going to really measure progress. We have gotten some great feedback and positive responses. The surveys have been a very helpful tool. The participants from the beginning of the program, and on boarding, are encouraged to reach out with questions and concerns. We also try to conduct different check-in's so that we can actively be engaged with the participants, and to understand what is going on or what support may be needed. Where are we today and what were we able to accomplish? With the support of the art attack - [Indiscernible] and grants being a part

of this agency, I think we have met our goals, and exceeded some of them. The goal was 25 matches statewide, and now with Erin being the new program coordinator, we are increasing the matches, and we have a number of 32 matches and counting. We are trying to make sure that we monitor and support the current matches that we have, and we're slowly increasing the number of matches, and we have had a lot of interest in the program. We are completing the eighth month of the implementation of this program, and we have a program for youth. The mentees are 18 years and older, but we have a few that are younger than 18, and we're looking at continuing to involve the younger transition age population. Amazingly, we had three employment outcomes since the start of the program, which is really what this program is all about. As I mentioned earlier, we did not necessarily think that we would see these types of outcomes so soon because a lot of the mentees are students. We did have some of these students that were looking for employment, graduating college, and the support of the mentoring program, and getting access to various resources and experiences within the community. Internship, and such, and we have three individuals that are employed and we're working with them to see when they are ready to potentially serve as mentors, and that is another great part of the program. To engage the mentees in becoming mentors. We have partners with youth disabilities on various events. We also accomplished and continue to develop and implement various events based on the needs and interests of the participants. There is a biweekly meeting with the [

Indiscernible] in surveys have been developed and implemented. There are wonderful things that we're finding with this program in terms of outcome and overall it is not that we have not had challenges, and we continue to have challenges. The program continues and as the word continues to get out, as we look at different ways to make the program sustainable, but overall we have been able to accomplish a good deal and met or exceeded some of our goals. Looking back again at the proposal, and some of our thoughts during the process, some things that have really gone well our involvement

of vocational rehabilitation staff . That is increased, and staff is really engaged and they seem mentoring as a new and another component to the VR process as another opportunity or option for the consumers, if and when applicable , and when the consumer is ready. That is been the main thing that the VR staff is thinking about how the consumer may benefit from mentoring. We have been looking at a programmatic level in seeing how to monitor the program and making changes smoothly as possible. In terms of continuing to evaluate and track different outcomes, something that we have noticed is that there is a need to gather data throughout, and from the beginning. Prior example - or example, to have surveys for the mentees in the beginning so that we can track their progress , and then the different skills and knowledge, skills that they have obtained, and knowledge that they have obtained. Those are some of the important changes their where are looking at for the program to make sure that we are collecting valuable

data. On this slide here, I have a VR management model which is something that our agency used as a part of the tracker or learning collaborative through the Institute for community inclusion that we are a part of. It has various components here such as communication, leadership, customers, partnerships, services and processes. Our mentoring program touches upon most if not all of these pieces of the model. We had agency leadership, advocates and supporters of the program, and helping with the outreach into the community. We have this program is being aligned with the agencies mission and strategic plans. The program is completely focused on our customers or consumers, and specifically transitioning . In terms of partnership we've made connections with employers through the mentors that are connected and brought into the program, and worked with those employers in the community to develop employment opportunities of when possible. We have worked on the VR counselors communication and amongst one another and engagement with this program. Having it offered as a new offered service for the VR consumer , quality assurance and metrics is been an area of focus for us, and how the data can be used to identify employment related outcome, skill development acquisition, and other trends for the program improvement. We are looking at how would utilize the data and metrics, so this model has been very helpful for us. As I mentioned, some lessons that we've learned throughout the progress - process of developing and implementing the program, and one is the importance of planning, gathering information about best

practices, and trying to find what types of mentoring programs that can engage the individuals with disabilities that are out there. How some of these items within these programs, or how to research and such would be applicable to us, or maybe not for our consumer population that is legally blind. It is important to look at the researching put a lot of thought into the planning and continue with the quality improvement, and constantly evaluating the program. That is something that we find very helpful and a lesson we have learned throughout the process. There's always a way for us together and utilize - to gather and utilize the feedback we are receiving. And an area of focus that we want to make sure that we are tracking and using the data that we collect, and especially now with the larger emphasis on the transition, agent youth, transition age population, and we want to look at how this program can be a part of that and be useful. A tool as part of the VR process . This is Camilla and I will pass it over to Erin to discuss with the future may look like.

Hello everyone and I will wrap up this fairly quickly, and there will be time for questions if people have them. What is the future? Obviously continued recruitment and matching, increase the matches statewide. To support the employment and become mentors down the road. To give back so to speak , continued analysis for the program , and an example would be the survey that we changed to it include the - and geared toward the population because of the mental programs out there. Continue technical assistance with the nano - national

center for mentoring and the national coalition center that I joined and I believe it will be a super asset for this project and program. We want to prepare for the next cycle with feedback from all involved. Again, we will look at transportation and come up with some creative ideas. People are getting together, and we have a lot of travel skills, but I think in the coming months that is something we will work on much more. There is a slide next on tips for the peers that are working on similar initiatives. And we do benchmarking for various steps, needed delegate and delineate roles and responsibilities to determine to be Western procedures and measures in the planning stage. Utilize the subject matter expert, and maintain an organized database to track the data from the beginning and that will make your life easier. To close, I will close on a quote that someone had from the Department of Labor, mentoring is recognized as one of the most important strategies to assisting the youth and making an important transition into adulthood. We believe that is true and we've seen that with the outcome of employment, and we hope that continues, and this is the program that we plan on continuing as well. Thank you all for listening, and I hope you've had great information from this, and if there are questions, we will get to them now that will be great, and if you want to contact me down the road, feel free to do so.

Thank you very much, Erin and Camilla, for that great presentation. We have a question about whether you will be able to share your policies and procedures that you have developed for this program, and Amy Phelps would

like to know that. >> Hello, and this is Camilla, and thank you for your questions Amy . In terms of the policies and procedures, that is mainly in the mentoring manual that we have, and also in certain manuals that we have adapted with help from the queue ID for mentor - UMB for mentor training, and I think that is something that Erin would be able to share with you. In terms of a particular database, we have been using Excel, and that has been helpful for us, and that is something we're looking at in terms of using access, or seeing what would work best for tracking information that we are trying to keep track of essentially. >> I have a question as well for you. You talked about the benefit to the mentees and you been surveying them. Have you looked at the benefits to the mentors, and frequently there are also benefits to the mentors in being in that role .

This is Camilla, and we have been looking also at collecting information and feedback from the mentors. We're always looking at any concerns that they may have or areas that we can support them, but also what benefits as we mentioned that they are getting out of the process. A lot of mentors come on board and say that they want to give back , or they feel like they have some time or the ability to engage in the mentor relationship. We found a lot of the individuals want to engage in something that they have time to engage in and that is reasonable in terms of the commitment. That is something that we are looking at, to make sure that the commitment is reasonable, and will also be fruitful and meaningful, and be enough time spent.

There's also a lot of material, ideas that are shared, matching the facility mentoring is share, and things that we have come up with that we've sent to the mentors, and they found this extremely helpful. A worksheet, or how to start a conversation, or they have found the workshops to help them be easier to engage with their mentor - mentees and get things going from the information they have been receiving. They are found this to be very helpful in terms of mentoring as well as the webinars .

I think you touched on this question, transportation and transportation issues. I was wondering, you do provide transportation to the events for people that may not have access to or get have the skills to engage in public transportation.

A great question. There has been some natural support in terms of the forms with ID, or mentors families, and things of that nature. Also, we want to incorporate that more in the contract away, and we do have some funding from the commission that we will be able to use, but it has to be done in a specific way. We're trying to streamline that a little bit.

Thank you very much . I do not see any more questions. I thank you again for your presentations. This webinar will be archived on our Explorer , VR.ORG website, and for those of you that had difficulty getting in, you can go in listen to it and it will be put up shortly. We are doing a

series of webinars. The next webinar will be this Thursday. The next webinar will be this Thursday, August 27, at 2 PM Eastern time. It will be from the Chickasaw nation vocational rehabilitation program on the national job placement and development models that they have been doing as a part of their collaborative. That have a rehabilitation program and a first tribal program that has participation. They are one of our cohorts, and it should be an interesting participation if you would like to joined us for that. Again, when the webinar closes, you will have the opportunity to complete a brief survey. And if you want at CRC credit, you will need to complete that to get the credit. We encourage everyone to complete the survey and we would like to have the feedback from you. Again, thank you everyone for attending. >> [Event concluded]