

## **Pathways to Partnerships Illinois Advisory Council Meeting**

06/24/2025 / 10:00am / Nell's Woodland – 2000 Alexis Ave, Ottawa, IL 61350

### **Present:**

David Kuriniec, Illinois Department of Human Services

Jim Knauf, Illinois Institute for Rehabilitation Education and Research

Christina Muri Irland, Illinois Institute for Rehabilitation and Employment Research

Meg Murphy, Illinois Institute of Technology

Eun-Jeong Lee (EJ), Illinois Institute of Technology

Nikki Ditchman, Illinois Institute of Technology

Kristin Wagner, Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services

Ang Wetmore, Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services

Kevin Irvine, Rush University Medical Center

Sarah Sinner, DRC Disability Resource Center in Joliet

Shannon Tarkowski, Life Center for Independent Living

Meri Helbig, Life Center for Independent Living

Daniella Delgado, Chicago Public Schools

Dr. LaMetric Lane, Illinois State Board of Education

Steven Johnson, Southern Illinois Center for Independent Living

Emily Metcalf, Lake County Center for Independent Living

Cathy Contarino, Impact Center for Independent Living

Marylin Haywood, Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Beth Bendtsen, Access Living

Briana Neurohr, Disability Resource Center at Joliet

Chun-Lung Lee, Illinois Institute for Rehabilitation and Employment Research

Travis Findlay, Iroquois County CUSD 9

Mitch Dickey, Transfr

Gracie Sánchez, Transfr

Kris Murray

Sam Abrams

Barbara Anderson

Tiffany Hughes

Cindy Klein-Webb, Impact Center for Independent Living

Jessica Sipovic, Illinois Center for Transition and Work

Nina Tangman, Illinois Board of Higher Education

Aimee Julian, Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support

Antonio Gomez, Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support

Terri Shandrow, Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support

Kiersten Baer, Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support

## WELCOME

**David Kuriniec** welcomed attendees to the meeting. Attendees introduced themselves.

**Marty Serena** welcomed attendees to Nell's Woodland, a 58-acre nature reserve which focuses on community-building through mental health and ecology. Marty Serena is the architect of the facility.

**Aimee Julian** reviewed the charges for the Advisory Council and the meeting cadence.

## Charges

- The Illinois Pathways to Partnership Project will establish an advisory committee to guide and assist in accomplishing this goal. The advisory workgroup or steering committee will provide an input on the development, implementation, and operationalization of partner activities that contribute to the success of project participants.
- The advisory committee will include key personnel from the partners, with at least 10 percent of the committee members being children and youth with disabilities and their support systems.

## UPDATES ON PROGRESS OF THE CURRICULUM – OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH/REVISIONS

**Alice Nicholes**, Ramp, was unavailable for the meeting, so this item was stricken from the agenda.

## SUCCESS STORIES – CILS

### *IMPACT CIL*

**Aimee Julian** introduced the Impact Center for Independent Living (CIL) **Cindy Klein-Webb** & **Cathy Contarino**.

**Klein-Webb** indicated that the Impact CIL is based out of the Collinsville school district.

The Impact CIL has had 42 students in 3 classrooms. Teachers have been receptive and supportive. Out of the four classes, one was dedicated to “Life Skills,” which covered employability and interviewing skills. Many participants were unaware that their meetings counted as Individualized Education Programs (IEP). This realization allowed participants to take agency of subsequent meetings. Collinsville has a relatively new farmers market in town and the owners there were very receptive to having students come in. They have

found that they have more success with smaller entities rather than the Schnucks or Wal-Mart. Walgreens has been the exception.

**Contarino** indicated that Klein-Webb joins the chamber of commerce meetings on a regular basis. She opened the floor for questions.

**Shannon Tarkowski**, Life CIL indicated that in Bloomington they have also found better luck with smaller employers.

**Meri Helbig** asked what their process has been to avoid duplication with existing efforts in schools. Klein-Webb indicated that the process is collaborative – that many schools will inform them if a student expresses interest in certain career fields so that they can investigate.

**Chun-Lung Lee** asked if there is a paid job at the end of these relationships. Klein-Webb responded that she hoped so. They have been collaborating with Madison CO. Training & Employment. They have found that internships tend to be less burdensome and lead to employment.

**Meg Murphy** asked if they had considered creating worksite agreements to allow all parties to understand their role in a work-based learning (WBL) capacity. Kuriniec responded that they hadn't but that should be pursued in the future. Julian added that Career and Technical Education (CTE) has established memorandums of understanding (MOU) which have led to a lot of success in apprenticeships and WBL. Kuriniec asked Julian for examples; Julian will follow up so that a template can be created for P2P.

**Christina Muri** provided the following resource in the chat: <https://disabilityin.org/who-we-are/corporate-partners/>

**LaMetric Lane** asked if there has been resistance from big businesses. Contarino responded that it isn't resistance, rather more layers to work through.

### *LIFE CIL*

**Shannon Tarkowski** indicated that Life CIL got off to a late start. Their original school did not work out, so DRS got them in touch with the Ford Co. school system. Ford Co. is very rural; 70% of residents commute outside of the county for work. That has presented challenges in terms of finding employment. The Parks & Rec program has been a massive ally. A few of the students have been able to work at the pool and concession 8-10 hrs. a week. Students have also been shadowing neurotypical students to get a feel for how to navigate the landscape. Additionally, as it's burdensome to ask students to commute to the CIL, they have been establishing relationships with the local libraries.

## LAKE CO. CIL

**Emily Metcalf** gave an update regarding a new position with Equestrian Connection, a horse therapy organization for people with disabilities. They will launch their internship on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Additionally, they had a student secure employment at Six Flags. Additionally, one of their interns at the CIL called disability services a college and began their secondary education journey. Overall, they are seeing an increase in confidence amongst participants.

She added that having an established MOU would be helpful, as some employers are beginning to ask for written agreements.

## UPDATE RE ACCESS POINTS TO CURRICULUM

**Christina Irland** presented an update to the curriculum – the creation of different access points. The material across all versions is the same, but to respond to feedback received through the year, each version has been updated to be accessible to a different range of students. Sarah Sinner and Shannon Tarkowski have been working on updating the curriculum. The following are the planned versions:

- White – Original (students with some support needs)
  - Some pictorial support
  - Simple language, but there are some paragraphs
  - Answering in writing/playing games
- Orange (students with moderate support needs)
  - Plain language
  - More pictorial support
  - Chunked out in topics
  - Providing additional examples of key concepts
  - More hands-on activities
- Blue (students with minimal support needs)
  - Minimal pictorial supports
  - Discussion built in, with brain breaks followed
  - Written responses for games
  - Pre- and post-lesson surveys
- PENDING: Black (students with high support needs)
  - Pictorial guides for each slide
  - Simple language, few words per slide
  - Topics broken down into very simplified information

By the annual meeting next month, they hope to have the first seven lessons ready. By August, they hope to have all completed in the first three levels. They hope to add a fourth by next year. All their materials will be checked by DoIT prior to release for accessibility.

**Chun-Lung Lee** asked how teachers are to address having students at various access points. Irland responded that teachers will decide which level to use and just present from one curriculum.

**LaMetric Lane** asked that there be train the trainer sessions, to give better guidance on how to navigate the different versions.

#### TRANSFR – OVERVIEW AND APPLICATION

**Mitch Dickey & Gracie Sánchez** presented an update on Transfr implementation. Dickey asked attendees what their struggles and successes have been.

**Sarah Sinner** indicated that they've seen great success in their office, but that they haven't mastered taking it to schools. Students have adjusted to the tech quickly and have enjoyed the career exploration. Dickey asked if that was due to wi-fi issues. Sinner responded that it was due to lack of space. Dickey added that they are in beta stages for an offline mode.

**Dickey** gave an update on several changes this year:

- Transfr Trek, a career mapping service, is available to all users. It includes a quiz to help with career placement, long and short-term career goals, and a career plan that can be sent to the student's counselor.
- The program includes an 8-week career resource with handouts, resources, reflections, and slide decks.
- 45 careers have been added. The plan is to have 50 careers by the end of the year.
- Transfr Trek includes approximately 100 careers. Generally, 10 are added per month.

**Sarah Sinner** noted that participants must complete the program for it to save. It will however, based off zip code, show you schools with programs related to your area of interest.

**Dickey** asked what challenges have been encountered so far:

- Sánchez noted that schools are less apprehensive about bringing in foreign devices.
- Sánchez reiterated that an offline mode is in beta-testing. The plan is to have a 24-hour window to upload.
- Tarkowski indicated that she had trouble establishing the boundaries, that sometimes items will be out of reach. Dickey asked that she send them any simulations where that is an issue. Tarkowski responded that it's generally the sims

where the participant has to turn more than 90 degrees. Simmer added that the EMT one caused this issue for her.

- Jim Knauf asked how they test the effectiveness of the program. Dickey responded that the headsets themselves don't have many assessments, but it does allow people to find blockers (e.g. if a participant isn't comfortable with blood). Transfr does have pre and post surveys, which have allowed to measure some impact. Data from those is in progress. Knauf asked if there was any placement data post-completion. Dickey responded that that is a longitudinal data question that is beyond Transfr's scope. What they are looking for is placement confidence. Lee asked if the pre- and post-surveys were editable. Dickey responded in the affirmative.
- Dickey and Sánchez offered to follow up on any items not brought up in this meeting.

#### DISCUSSION: IDENTIFY LINKAGES TO JOB OPPORTUNITIES/INTERNSHIPS/APPRENTICESHIPS, AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OPTIONS

**Mitch Dickey** brought up the work that Madison County is doing around apprenticeships for individuals with disabilities. Julian asked if they would be interested in having Tony Fuhrmann come and speak. The group responded in the affirmative.

**Jim Knauf** clarified the question: For those who have completed your curriculum this semester, are there any students that you've identified for potential job placement? Metcalf indicated that they had one successful partnership with two internships. It's an 8-week summer internship. They'll be working in a barn to groom horses and schedule people for rides. They assigned an employee to be job coach.

**Kevin Irvine** shared a link to a resource that keeps track of postsecondary certificates for students with intellectual disabilities who would like to go to college:

<https://thinkcollege.net/>.

**Julian** suggested asking the Children's Discovery Museum in Normal, IL, as they provide jobs for students.

**Jessica Sipovic** indicated that in Chicago they have been able to work with the mayor's office to get students paid summer internships. Daniella Delgado provided the following resource, which shows opportunities in the Chicago area:

<https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mopd.html>.

**Meg Murphy** asked if participants had teamed up with their local DRS offices. Knauf seconded this point, as part of the deliverables of this project is to make referrals to DRS for age-appropriate customers (14-24).

**Christina Muri** indicated that, for the SWTCIE project, they have been working with school districts, since they have a lot of open positions while students are back home.

Mitch Dickey recommended looking at the Education for Employment (EFE) directory: [https://www.isbe.net/Documents/efe\\_directory.pdf](https://www.isbe.net/Documents/efe_directory.pdf).

**Meg Murphy** asked if there was a place that employers could post if they are interested in interns. Julian responded that local workforce boards would be a good place to get plugged in. She recommended to speak to **Antonio Gomez**, as he is lead staff of the Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship (WBLA) Committee of the IWIB. She asked if DRS had a “superstar employer” list. Knauf replied that he wasn’t sure. Julian indicated that WBLA is working on a “Catalyst” program to highlight employers, but that she wasn’t sure that individuals with disabilities have been plugged in. Dir. Rahnee Patrick, DRS, is a member of the committee.

ADJOURNMENT

**David Kuriniec** thanked everyone for participating. Knauf added that they will have more news related to new hires forthcoming. The meeting was adjourned.